

FAR CRY 5 THE FUTURE OF OPEN WORLDS
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INSIDE DEATH STRANDING
Everything you need to know about Hideo Kojima's latest
25 YEARS OF REBELLION
CELEBRATING THE LEGENDARY STUDIO
HOLLIE BENNETT OF PLAYSTATION ACCESS LEADS OUR
HOW TO
SPECIAL ISSUE
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WHAT NEXT FOR LARA?
We dissect Shadow Of The Tomb Raider
FUTURE
ISSUE 196


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OVERWATCH
WORLD CUP
2017

If there's one thing I love above all other things working on **games™** it's being able to talk with game developers about the craft of making games. I don't have any particular skills in game-making myself, but I find the creative process and the multifaceted nature of it to be endlessly captivating. As a result, whether it happens to be while my Dictaphone is recording or not, I love to talk to developers about how they got into the games industry, what their roles are actually like and how all the pieces fit together.

It was musing on this subject that lead us to try something a little different this issue; a How To special to demystify the world of gaming and offer some guides that not only tell you more about what makes the industry tick, but will hopefully offer some tips to enhance your daily gaming experience and inspire you to try out some new things. We thought long and hard about the kind of questions that we tend to hear often from you, our readers, about the advice you're looking for, the issues you face and the games you love to play. Therefore, we have produced a massive feature packed full of practical setup advice, guides to some of the extracurricular interests of many gamers, and that all-important industry insight that kickstarted the whole endeavour.

So, as well as offering our usual access and analysis of upcoming titles and our reviews of the latest releases, this special issue is dedicated to telling you how to achieve more, appreciate more, and understand more about the games we love. I hope you enjoy it.

Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR




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HOW TO SPECIAL

Let us guide you through how you can get more from your gaming experience through boosting your setup, mastering games and even making some of your own



HOW FAR CRY 5 IS UNLEASHING ANARCHY ON THE U.S. OF A.

→ CREATIVE DIRECTOR DAN HAY REVEALS HOW UBISOFT MONTREAL IS ATTEMPTING TO REINVENT THE OPEN-WORLD SANDBOX

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT** | DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL** | RELEASE: **MARCH 2018** | PLAYERS: **1-2**

It has been getting increasingly difficult to find enthusiasm for Far Cry. The series defined itself in the early Noughties through stages of rampant reinvention. Some view this period as Far Cry simply trying to find its voice, others believe it to be a manifestation of Ubisoft Montreal's huge ambition in the open world sandbox space – that Far Cry represented a creative outlet in which the development teams could play, the risk low but the potential reward high.

But in 2012, with the release of *Far Cry 3*, reinvention gave way to iteration. The locations may change between instalments, but the core loop remains the same; enjoyable as it is, we are hungry for more. Eager to see a Far Cry game that truly belongs in the current climate, one that is eagerly taking advantage of modern technology, pushing confidently into uncharted territories with a newfound sense of energy and freedom.

That isn't *Far Cry 5*. Not on the surface of it, at any rate. Ubisoft Montreal is bringing the action stateside for the very first time; tropical paradises replaced by rural Montana, with the series' trademark tyrants displaced in favour of charismatic cultists. If this were the best the studio had to offer we'd be intrigued, but not necessarily ecstatic. Not content with sitting here and wallowing in a well of our own discontent, we took our concerns directly to creative director Dan Hay; questioning whether there is more than meets the eye to *Far Cry 5* and, should that be the case, whether it is even possible to accurately convey that to an audience that has a tendency to engage with little more than 280 characters. "I'm sure there is," he says, a smile creeping across his face, "But it's just going to be a bullshit marketing answer. That's not what I'm going to do."

NOW WE'RE TALKING

"What I'm going to tell you is this… the nice thing about this age is that some people are engaging with a quick synopsis of things, but life is much more complicated than that. What I've learned over time is to try your best, try not to speak in absolutes all of the time, and to try and offer an experience that, once you scratch the surface, you can see in a little deeper. I think what's going to be interesting to people picking up *Far Cry 5* is that they may look at it and think that it's this one thing, and then they are going to play it and go, 'Oh okay, it's also this other thing.'"

That's what we were hoping to hear. It's difficult to get a read of Far Cry at preview stage; much like *Ghost Recon Wildlands*, so much of the fun to be found in it is purely anecdotal. That is to say, that the convergence of the various systems working behind the polygons creates these moments of intense insanity that are fairly unique to you and your specific experience. Hope County, Montana may be a setting that every player will explore, but what you encounter within its various biomes – around its core cast of characters and story – will largely differ from player to player. We know that the gunplay is exquisite and empowering, and that the weapon feedback and controls are tight as all hell, but what we don't know is what happens in between those moments that you're feeding clip after clip into an assault rifle. »

> "PEOPLE HAVE THIS IDEA THAT YOU CAN'T EAT DESSERT FIRST. AND WHY? I *LOVE* DESSERT"
> **DAN HAY, CREATIVE DIRECTOR**



■ Below: *Far Cry 5* sets you lose in America for the very first time, using everything at your disposal to uproot a cult that has taken over Hope County, Montana.


Ubisoft Montreal has put a lot of resources into the graphical and audio presentation of *Far Cry 5*, it's a powerhouse.



Hay, as it should happen, has an anecdotal way of describing this process. You see, building games isn't easy, particularly those of the open world sandbox variety. But after *Far Cry 3*, *4* and *Primal*, Ubisoft Montreal is eager to open up the experience more than it has ever done in the past – removing many of the boundaries and barriers to free-form play, pushing for a world and story that is reactive to your presence. "The trick when you're building a game that has this many pieces to ensure that it is not a buffet, to make sure that it does not all have one taste," he considers, our eyebrows raising a little higher by the second. While we *did* conduct this interview shortly after lunch, we thought it best to wait this out and see where Hay took us. It was worth it. "That it's curated, and that it at least makes the effort – that it feels like a meal that comes in full courses, regardless of the order that you choose to order them in. And that's difficult to do, because I think that people have this prescribed idea that you can't eat dessert first. And why? I *love* dessert, and there might not be room for it at the end."

If we're going to continue rolling with this eating analogy, Hay is essentially eager to let people grab a hold of the multi-course offering of content that it has cooked up over the last three years and digest it in any way, and in any order, that they like. Does that sound gluttonous? Well, we have (admittedly) gotten pretty damned greedy over the years. As open worlds continue to grow in size and complexity, so too has our appetite for *more* content, *more* varied experiences, and *more* moments that are both sharable and memorable.

> "IF I THINK ABOUT THE LARGER FEELING ON FAR CRY, IT'S JUST TO BE ABLE TO GROW THE ANECDOTE FACTORY"
> **DAN HAY, CREATIVE DIRECTOR**

It is, of course, difficult to give players a true sense of freedom without shoving a controller directly into their hands and stealing a few hours of their time. Given that the series has been active since 2004, many developers have tried to portray an open structure to players while still maintaining a degree of mystery over its story and direction. What is it that makes this Ubisoft Montreal team any different?

"I think it's our willingness to do the unexpected, a willingness to try and challenge ourselves," counters Hay. "It would have been really, really easy to make a linear game, one that knew where the player was going to be [at all times] and be able to write a story with characters that we could tell would show up moment-to-moment. That would have been very easy… this has not been very easy," he continues, erupting into laughter. It's the kind of laughter that masks a very real exhaustion, so we ask, has it been worth it? "We made a choice to set the bar really very high; we made it challenging for ourselves."

"I think people will appreciate it, but the thing as developers is we have to realise that some people will never notice it all," says Hay, giving us some degree of insight into one of the most difficult challenges that developers of these sandbox games are so often presented with. A game like *Far Cry 5* takes years to create, and costs millions to produce, with literally hundreds of staff across the globe all offering their expertise, knowledge and talent to the altar of triple-A game production. It takes all of these resources to make a game such as Far Cry as vibrant, bustling and crammed with content as humanly possible. Developers want players to interact and engage with their work, as much of it as possible; pulling down the barriers to play and offering a truly free-form experience is then, in essence, terrifying – there's a reason elements such as Towers and waypoint-heavy mini-maps have become such a mainstay of the genre; they subtly guide the player between the content and intricacy crafted points of interest. *Far Cry 5*, we're told, will feature neither.

"One of the things about building a game is that it's about the road you've travelled [in development], and there are roads that you can't travel; you may never know what you missed. So we built this super-earnest story with all of these opportunities, with these characters, and we go, 'This is it! Go over here and you're going to meet all of these characters' and the player is just like, 'No, I'm not! I'm going this way!' And we say, 'Well, what about all of this great content?' And they say, 'Well, yeah, but I'm over here doing all of this great content.' We just have to say okay," he says, throwing his hands into the air. "We've just got to take it."

Hay believes that this reflects some of the wider beliefs within Ubisoft. *Wildlands* is a perfect example, although *Assassin's Creed Origins* stunned players late last year by loosening the reins a little in its interpretation of Egypt. While he wasn't willing to speculate on how this approach to design would feed into the next cycle of Ubisoft sequels, he was able to comment specifically on how it has informed his Far Cry team: "It's a big team, and it very much has its own culture and its own mindset. If I think about the larger feeling on Far Cry, it's just to be able to grow the anecdote factory. To be able to put it into a situation where players can do whatever they want to do, whenever they want to do it."

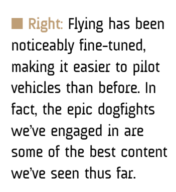
"The game that we are building is really unique and really generous. I think the mindset is to encourage Far Cry players and allow them to kind of experience it – and not necessarily the way that we intended. I just want to give them the controller; they will tell us the way they want to play."

This isn't all to say that the game will be aimless, only that the aim will be ever shifting. Unlike previous Far Cry games, in which your character is pre-defined, you'll be able to create your own this time out – a blank canvas, a sheriff in over his head attempting to take Hope County back from a god-fearing cult that believes the end is nigh.

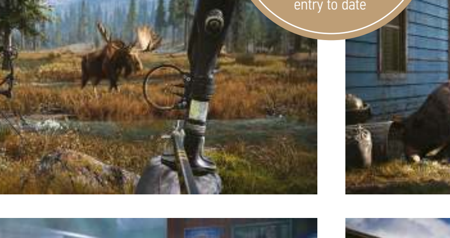
You can choose to engage in the main story, participating in a little constitutionally approved anarchy, or you can head out on the road less travelled. The characters that you'll encounter live autonomously in pockets of Montana, unaware of what is happening elsewhere in the gorgeous – and surprisingly varied – biomes of Hope County. Side quests will be hidden away, just waiting to be found and completed; animals roam the forests freely, begging to be hunted; right-wing cultists operate on most of the major roads and throughways, just waiting to push back the law as it prepares for the rapture with a baptism of fire and bullet shells. The choice is in your hands, and Ubisoft Montreal isn't interested in holding your sweaty mitts all the way through it. "The way I chose to look at it is this… the game has a body, the spine is the story and the characters, but outside of that you can go where you want, do what you want, and experience what you want to," continues Hay. "I think that, in terms of a prescription of what you are supposed to do, there is none of that; there is no funnel. We put together opportunities for you to go out into the world, to meet characters, to find out different micro-stories, but there is no 'You've got to do this, not this…' the game is much more reactive."

"That's what's really, really interesting about discovery within the confines of this game," considers Hay, eager for players to experience *Far Cry 5* on 27 February and dive deeply into the product of so much passion and attention. "We're hinting at things like that and we're bringing them into this space. I think it's going to be really powerful."


Above: You'll be able to team up with a variety of the locals of the world, using their expertise to give you new options and opportunities in combat. Right: Hunting is still a big part of the game, and the switch to rural America hasn't cut into any of the animal based chaos you'll get yourself into.


Right: Flying has been noticeably fine-tuned, making it easier to pilot vehicles than before. In fact, the epic dogfights we've engaged in are some of the best content we've seen thus far.

IN BRIEF
Far Cry ditches the tropical paradise and heads to America for its biggest and most expansive entry to date









BUILDING A BETTER CULTIST

Far Cry 5 is built around Hope County, Montana – a fictional, romanticised mirror of the real place. Only, in Ubisoft Montreal's interpretation, the area has been seized by religious fanatics preparing for the end of the world. Led by Joseph Seed, aka The Father, a cultish congregation has taken up arms as Eden's Gate, and is beginning to prepare for the inevitable collapse of society in the only way that small-town America knows how.

Far Cry has always been known for its larger than life villains, and this instalment is set to be no different. "I was getting pretty nervous… because I didn't know a whole lot about cults," laughs Hay. "I had done a lot of research and mined stories that I had heard, and read a lot of books, and began to build this profile, but what I really needed was validation. So we brought in these cult experts."

The team brought in cult experts from across the world – such as Rick Alan Ross (seriously, make sure you look this guy up) – to bring an authenticity to the way the charismatic cultists look, speak and act. "Rick Ross was great. He was like, 'Yeah! That makes total sense; that's super cool, *for sure* that happened; and I'll tell you where that happened, and I practically *know* that guy!'"

"What was really cool about it was that the more he spoke was the more we realised that there was something that we were missing. Which is… these cults almost have a language of their own – a parlance in the way that they communicate. They use nouns and verbs that we don't ordinarily use, and it became authentic only when we started to build our own language and talk about the rhetoric that these guys talk about. That was a big moment for us to be able to go: we've built a magnetic character; we've built a believable fiction; yes, we've built our own space; and yes we want people to understand that it is entertainment, but it also has to have the feeling and the cadence of what a real cult would have. Once we had that, once we started to see that out in our world, it started to feel much more… real."



TEN THINGS WE THINK WE KNOW ABOUT DEATH STRANDING (BUT PROBABLY DON'T)

→ WE BREAK DOWN KOJIMA'S LATEST TEASER TO SEE WHAT SECRETS IT REVEALS

FORMAT: **PS4** | PUBLISHER: **SONY** | DEVELOPER: **KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS** | RELEASE: **TBC** | PLAYERS: **TBC**

MAGIC RAIN SPEEDS UP TIME

1 As the camera pans over Reedus' body, the rain causes the vegetation around him to spring up and wither. Kojima's confirmed that this is 'Timefall' – rainfall that speeds up time. Why neither Reedus or his buddy are affected is unclear, but the guy pinned by the truck isn't immune.

THERE'S A SECOND BIG BANG

2 Reedus' narration retells the Big Bang theory. But as the teaser progresses, we're introduced to the idea of a second Big Bang, one that devastated the world as we know it. What could've caused it remains unknown for now, but Kojima's explored the idea of nuclear war many times before.

NORMAN REEDUS IS A PORTER...

3 This is a shot in the dark as it's possible 'Porter' may be Reedus' surname, but given what the men are doing - moving bodies around, and transporting a baby in a box – we're inclined to believe this is his occupation rather than name. That said, we do learn that Reedus' character's first name is Sam.

...AND WORKS FOR A DISPOSAL TEAM

4 When the camera pans to the unfortunate soul squished by the vehicle, the words "Corpse Disposal Team 6" can be read on the uniforms of the men. Quite how the world has gotten to the state to need full-time corpse disposal teams we have no idea, but it's not looking good.

THE BABY DETECTS ENEMIES

5 Whilst trying to pull his buddy from the wreck, Reedus' partner shouts, "Shit, they're here!" as the robotic arm over his shoulder starts flashing. However, it seems it's the baby he's holding that triggers this, not the gear. Reedus' sensor only deploys when he's holding the baby.

IN BRIEF

The exact details of Hideo Kojima's latest project are being closely guarded and sparsely disseminated, but it's all very intriguing







WRISTBANDS ARE LIFE METERS

6 Kojima's revealed that this latest trailer is footage from an early section of the game. If true, that means we may be playing without a HUD. It's plausible that the characters' wristbands indicate life level, the bands' colours mimicking that of the PS4's DualShock.

THE OIL WANTS YOU IF YOU'RE ALIVE...

7 The oil – thought to be manipulated by one/all of the beings we've seen suspended mid-air – apparently isn't interested in taking you if you're dead. The moment Reedus' buddy puts the poor lad pinned beneath the vehicle out of his misery, the oil dropped him instantly.

...BUT DEATH IS NOT A DO-OVER

8 Reedus' character is plunged into an ocean where fish swim upside down and everything drifts to the surface. Kojima has hinted this is a kind of purgatory, a place for you to gather items before continuing your game. Just don't expect to be dropped off precisely where you left off...

THE HOODED MAN IS MADS MIKKELSEN

9 There's no way to confirm this, but while it's only on-screen briefly, the way the hooded character gesticulates and puts its finger to its lips is eerily reminiscent of Mads' movements in a prior teaser. Could this be Mads in action... albeit without his death marionettes this time?

THERE MAY BE MULTIPLAYER

10 Kojima's already showed us he thinks globally when it comes to multiplayer. Given the recurring 'connections' motif (strands, ropes, umbilical cords etc) – plus Kojima's desire for "people to be connected" – isn't the internet the perfect facilitator for this concept?

DREAMS AND THE ART OF FOCUSED CREATIVITY

→ MEDIA MOLECULE COULD BE CREATING THE ONLY GAME YOU'LL NEED FOR THE REST OF THE GENERATION

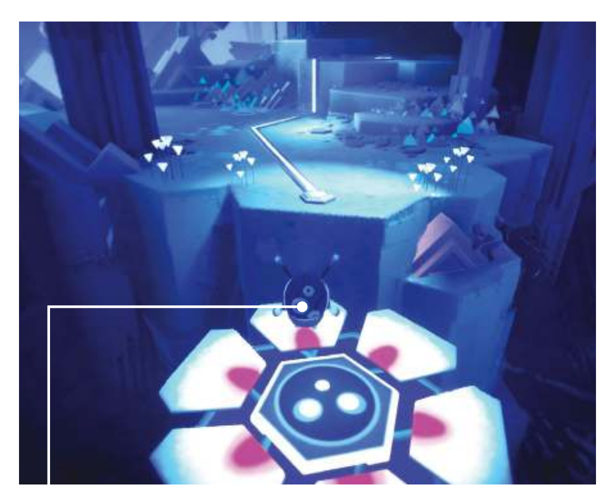
FORMAT: **PS4** | PUBLISHER: **SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **MEDIA MOLECULE** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018** | PLAYERS: **1-2 (1-TBC ONLINE)**

There are few things more intimidating, even to the most creative soul, than a blank canvas. And as a player, it's rare that we have to encounter that kind of sensation, but it's a hurdle that Media Molecule's games seem to come up against time and time again with its commitment to handing the keys to its kingdoms over to us. With *Dreams*, there is so much more that's possible and so much freedom to create, but also so much simplicity in its implementation that it might just be able to help you get over that creative block that can stand in the way of fully enjoying the play, create, share concept.

Entire landscapes can be thrown together on a whim in minutes, foliage and scenery painted over the top. Watching someone create and remix ideas in *Dreams* might actually be as entertaining as playing the final experiences. Everything about the suite of tools looks wonderfully intuitive even though it takes the relatively simple concepts of *LittleBigPlanet* and blows them up into something insane. Where once there were only platformers, now you can make any number of different genres of experience in this game and share them with the world. This feels like peak Media Molecule and that remains very exciting indeed.



"WATCHING SOMEONE CREATE AND REMIX IDEAS IN DREAMS MIGHT ACTUALLY BE AS ENTERTAINING AS PLAYING THE FINAL EXPERIENCES"



COLLABORATE TO CREATE

Rather than having to make everything on your own you can invite others to join your dream and collaborate in the creation of it. Additionally, the more you perform a type of task (say, music-making or sculpting) the more experience you earn in that area and you earn accolades in that skill. You can then search for people with those skills to find specialists to help your build.



FULL STORY EXPERIENCE

Media Molecule isn't going to leave you hanging if you're not much of a creative type yourself. There's a full campaign (that can be played in two-player coach co-op) spanning three different interweaving stories of a homeless guy in a noir world, a trio of fantasy characters in a dark fairytale and a small robot in a sci-fi world. A Dream Surfing mode generates a story from community content too, for a curated experience of user levels.

IN BRIEF

The Play, Create, Share mantra of Media Molecule is taken to all new heights, breadths and depths



FULL VR INTEGRATION

We're guessing this is one of the major reasons the game has taken a little while to show up again, but you can now create your dream from within PSVR, which is fantastic news. Move support was already in there of course, but having a full VR view will make things even better for creating games. And you can make VR games too, which is even more exciting.



MEGA MAN 11 IS RETRO ACTION FOR A MODERN ERA

→ CAPCOM IS CELEBRATING THIS BIG ANNIVERSARY IN STYLE

FORMAT: **PS4, SWITCH, XBOX ONE** | PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | PLAYERS: **1** | RELEASE: **TBA 2018**

Capcom is about to give Mega Man its most significant overhaul in 30 years. 2018 will see the iconic character given a new lease on life, with the studio dropping the 8-bit aesthetic that has served it so well over the years in favour of something a little more, well, modern.

Modern, but not necessarily new; *Mega Man 11* will be adopting a 2.5D style. That is to say that it will be implementing 3D sprites across 2D environments. It's a move that has earned the new title quite a few comparisons to *Mighty No. 9* – Comcept's ill-fated attempt to modernise Mega Man back in 2016. *Mega Man 11* is already displaying far more promise; the new hand drawn art style displaying richer textures and more depth and detail in its environments than *Mighty No. 9* could ever muster, while the gameplay looks as torturous as ever.

This will be the first new Mega Man game to launch since 2010's *Mega Man 10.* If you aren't familiar with that particular modern revival, *10* (and its predecessor) were praised for their ability to capture the essence of the retro releases. The games were challenging, intricately designed and traditional in their approach to 2D action and platforming. What we're saying is, Capcom knows what it's doing when it comes to Mega Man. What we've seen of *11* in action thus far shows a lot of promise, a game built on the foundation of tightly timed jumps, crazy tough (and crazy looking) boss battles, and suits of armour that imbue the popular hero with an array of new abilities and powers.

IN BRIEF
Legendary gaming series Mega Man celebrates its 30th anniversary in style as Capcom announced an all-new instalment to the series

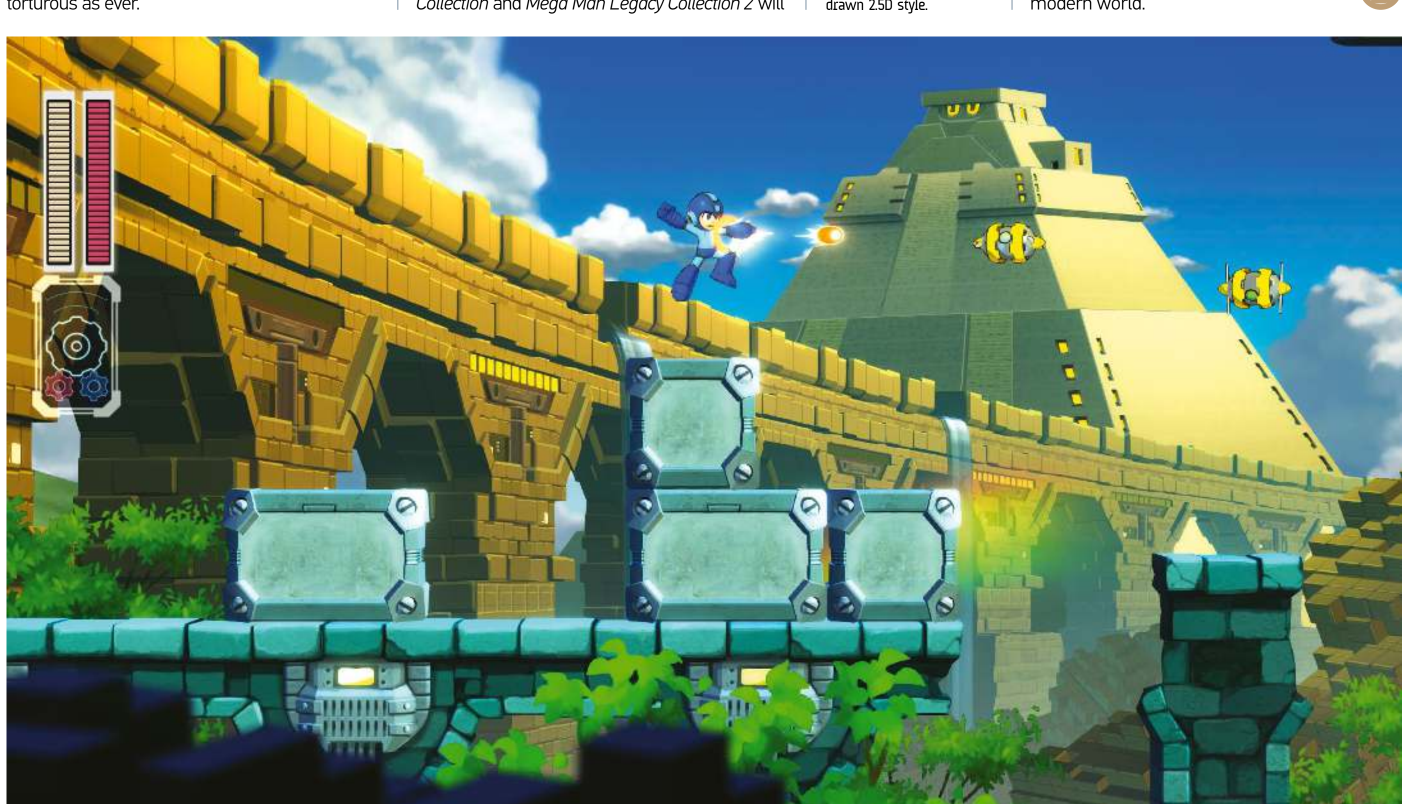
Mega Man 11 isn't the only way that Capcom is celebrating the 30th anniversary of the original NES release. *Mega Man Legacy Collection* and *Mega Man Legacy Collection 2* will be making their way to Nintendo Switch in 2018 (following their successful launch on PS4 and Xbox One) while all eight games in the spin-off *Mega Man X* series will also be making their way to all four of the major platforms in the 12 months ahead.

What we're saying is that it's a great time to be a fan of Mega Man. The new instalment looks fantastic; a small adjustment to the new art style is necessary, but it's how the game plays that really matters to us. As we said before, *Mega Man 11* is already showing much more promise through its early reveal than *Mighty No. 9* could ever muster and we're really excited to see just how Capcom plans on bringing this legacy series into the modern world.



Above: *Mega Man 11* is the first game to release in the mainline series since 2010's *Mega Man 10*, and Capcom has promised that it'll be faithful to the legacy.

Below: The most obvious change in *Mega Man 11* is that of the art-style, with Capcom dropping the 8-bit art in favour of a hand-drawn 2.5D style.



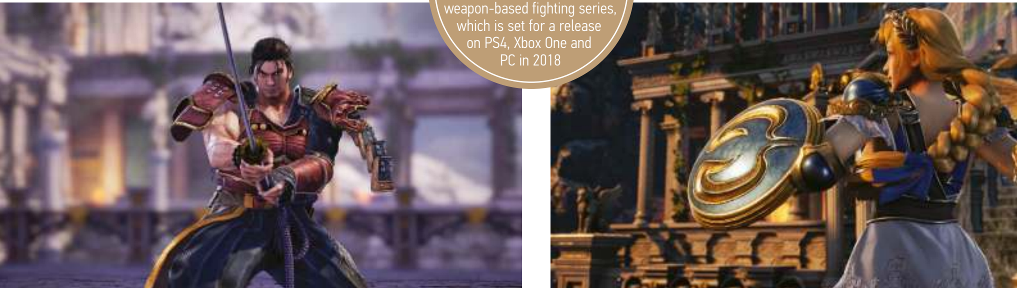
IN BRIEF
Bandai Namco reveals the next iteration of its long-running weapon-based fighting series, which is set for a release on PS4, Xbox One and PC in 2018

GUEST STARS



→ **We could yet see a plethora of heroes and villains from other franchises join the cast**

In later iterations of the game, guest characters had begun to become a focal part of the series. Many fans felt this initially interesting approach began to take priority over the focus on improving the series' core gameplay and cheap exploits. Some felt this was an unnecessary gimmick and held out hopes that future games would move away from this. *Soulcalibur VI*'s producer is not giving much away in this regard, and the feeling is that it's not so much a case of 'if' rather than 'when' potential guest characters will be revealed. Project Soul is looking to recreate the series' feel-good factor, and by taking its lead from the solid gameplay mechanics of *SoulCalibur II* rather than the much iterated sequels it may well be on the right track.







SOULCALIBUR VI RETURNS TO TELL A TALE OF SOULS AND SWORDS

→ A LOOK AT THE RETURN OF THE SWASHBUCKLING 16TH CENTURY FIGHTING GAME

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | PUBLISHER: **BANDAI NAMCO** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | RELEASE: **2018** | PLAYERS: **1-TBC**

After a five-year hiatus, Bandai Namco has announced a sequel to its seemingly forgotten weapon-based fighter. On first impressions *Soulcalibur VI* looks like a solid return to form, and with the impending 20th anniversary for the series, it's been missed. Following the positive response to *Tekken 7*, Bandai Namco has given its other fighter another chance, heralding the return of a series that had steadily declined following *SoulCalibur II*. That game was the first to feature guest characters, and introduced Zelda's Link, Tekken's Heihachi Mishima, and even Image Comics' Spawn (but we'll pretend that didn't happen). Later games saw the inclusion of the likes of Star Wars' Darth Vader, Yoda and even Assassin's Creed's Ezio Auditore. But it was clear by *Soulcalibur V* that the series had lost its way.

The weapon-based brawler has always prioritised the visual spectacle over the technical aspects of fighting, and while few would deny that the series has some of the most colourful and enjoyable bouts in gaming, such extravagance came at the expense of gameplay depth. The simplicity of Soulcalibur's combat and exploitable mechanics were part of the reason why it hasn't remained as a competitive fighting scene mainstay.

That role has been filled by Tekken over the years, allowing Soulcalibur to luxuriate in the ridiculous and sometimes sublime nonsense of its clashing warriors. While few would deny that Soulcalibur had some of the most colourful and enjoyable bouts in gaming, such extravagance came at the expense of gameplay depth. The simplicity of Soulcalibur's combat and exploitable mechanics were part of the reason why it wasn't a competitive fighting scene mainstay. This wasn't helped by Bandai Namco's lack of interaction with the fighting communities outside Japan and South Korea.

Leaning into its strengths in the spectable stakes, *Soulcalibur VI* features an all-new gameplay system, Reversal Edge, that is inspired by the epic battles between skilled fighters in the movies with a slow-motion effect – a bullet time of sorts. Think Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and you're there. This will enable skilled fighters to utilise the slowing action to defend an onslaught while preparing for a counter attack. Hopefully *Soulcalibur VI* eradicates much-maligned exploits like the guard-step glitch which cheapened the experience in *Soulcalibur IV*. The combat in *Soulcalibur VI* is built on a three power system, where one move can overpower another, which is kind of like a rock, paper, scissors affair.

From what we've seen so far in an intense battle between series mainstays Mitsurugi and Sophitia – in a time-lapsed stage resembling ancient Greece – the combat looks to retain the swift and fluid style the series is known for. As each fighter trades blows with their opponent, their armour is steadily destroyed, emphasising the impact of each strike and addind to the drama of the battle.

The game's producer, Motohiro Okubo, has stated that Project Soul wanted to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Soulcalibur, feeling that the best way to achieve this would be with a series refresh. He has indicated that the sequel will implement the speed and responsiveness of *SoulCalibur II*, combining this with the balanced characters and gameplay mechanics of *Soulcalibur V*. The game has been quietly in development for the past three years, and it's clear that Project Soul clearly wants to revive the series for a new generation by refining the experience without reinventing the wheel. Sadly it seems that any chance of a Nintendo Switch port may be off the cards due to development on *Soulcalibur VI* beginning before the console's announcement. However, Okubo remains hopeful that a future port could happen, providing the Switch can handle Unreal 4 without issue.

> "PROJECT SOUL CLEARLY WANTS TO REVIVE THE SERIES FOR A NEW GENERATION BY REFINING THE EXPERIENCE WITHOUT REINVENTING THE WHEEL"

It's good to see the series is still alive, and visually it looks just how we would expect on today's technology. The game is powered by Unreal 4, and it looks to be working well with the developers able to recreate the series' signature tone to fantastic effects. This is evident throughout the footage shown, covering the surroundings in realistic shadows set against the saturated yellow of the setting sun. Everything looks wonderful, shimmering waterfalls cascade down the side of brilliant white limestone rocks, and seeing the coruscating of the gold detailing on Sophitia's armour is a sight to behold.

By taking the character balance improvements from *Soulcalibur V*, enhancing the visuals tenfold with Unreal 4, and combining the movement speed and responsiveness of *SoulCalibur II*, all signs are pointing towards a sequel that aims to capture the magic of the early games.



■ Above: *Soulcalibur VI* will be looking to introduce new players to the core concepts of how the game works, like how certain moves are perfect counters to others.
Below: The development team has said that it will be looking to *SoulCalibur II* and *Soulcalibur V* as its key touchstones for the feel and flow of the game.

Working as a four-player crew is easily the best way to enjoy playing *Sea of Thieves*, but now we know that it really doesn't matter how long someone has been playing for them to join you and share your adventures, that makes finding candidates a lot simpler. There's no barrier for crew entry unless you choose to enforce one.

NOW WE KNOW HOW WE'LL SPEND OUR TIME IN SEA OF THIEVES

→ RARE OPENS UP ON ITS PROGRESSION SYSTEMS AND HOW YOU'LL MAKE YOURSELF A PIRATE LEGEND

FORMAT: **XBOX ONE, PC** | PUBLISHER: **MICROSOFT** | DEVELOPER: **RARE** | RELEASE: **20 MARCH 2018** | PLAYERS: **MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER**

Before now, Rare has been talking in vague terms about exactly how we'll be spending our time playing *Sea of Thieves* when the massively multiplayer pirate sim launches on Xbox One and PC, but finally it has placed its cards on the table, and we're impressed with the ideas it has brought forward. The promise of building your own pirate legend and having a multiplayer experience that is open and customisable remains intact.

Up until now we've known that treasure hunting and skeleton pirate fighting would take up much of our time, but exactly how, why and when these things would come into play, how they were initiated, remained something of a mystery. It turns out that *Sea of Thieves* has its own economic system through a series of Trading Companies, each of which have specific interests and tasks for you to complete. It's these companies who will give you quests and missions to embark upon, earning you rewards specific to that company.

First we have the Gold Hoarders, whose interests are fairly self-explanatory. They will give you keys to treasure chests lost around the world or riddles pointing in their direction with the promise of big rewards if you return the chests to them.

IN BRIEF
Join an open and hostile ocean of lawless gamers as you seek treasure, glory and adventure on the high seas

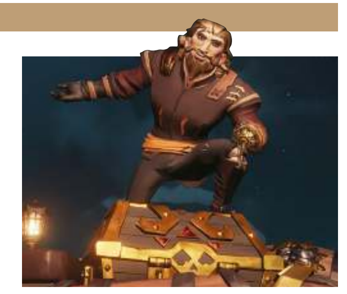
The Merchant Alliance are traders, and they earn their coin in more traditional ways. For this company you'll be asked to transport goods (animals, barrels full of explosives) across the treacherous seas, either to their purchaser or back to the company.

As with everything else in *Sea of Thieves* that you might store on your ship, it can be stolen by other crews or destroyed in battle, so protecting your shipment is all-important. Some of these missions will also have time limits attached to them, encouraging you to stay on course and navigate the seas





Right: No matter how many times we play *Sea of Thieves* we can't get over how amazing the ocean looks and how well the water physics interact with the ship. Rare was always going to have to do a lot of work in this area, but it deserves a great deal of credit for how much it adds to the experience.



INKY DEPTHS

→ A comic be comin' captain

Sea of Thieves will not only be an ongoing multiplayer experience, but also a comic series, thanks to Titan Comics. The first issue of *Sea of Thieves* will be launching in March, around the same time that the game reaches our shores. The comic will follow two crews who are chasing down the same treasure, battling monsters, avoiding traps and generally getting up to all sorts of hijinks. The series will be written by the author of *Princeless*, Jeremy Whitley, and provided art by the marvellously named Rhoald Marcellius (seriously, who else would you want drawing a pirate comic) who has done some great work for Marvel on the *Content Of Champions* series and *All-New Inhumans*. The style varies a little from Rare's look for the game, but it maintains the spirit of fun and light-hearted looting that makes *Sea of Thieves* such a joy to play. Keep an eye out for this one in comic book stores soon.



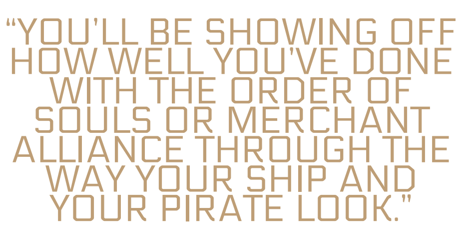




as best you can (do you plough through the thunderstorm ahead or navigate around?).

Lastly we have the Order of Souls, who are our mystical traders. What they want are the souls of fallen pirates, but thankfully (at least for the moment) that doesn't mean the souls of other players in the game, but of the skeleton crews you'll meet around the world. Bring back the skulls of these undead seadogs and you'll be given rewards. We've seen already that some of these crews now hold fortresses on islands around the world, so taking out some of them may prove to be quite a challenge.

And what do you get for your troubles? Well, gold for starters, which you can then spend on various resources and cosmetic items at stores at ports around the map, but also company-specific items. As you progress with each company your standing with them will increase and they'll give you clothing and cosmetic items for your vessel that will tell the world that you have built up a reputation with that faction. As you sail the high seas you'll be showing off how well you've done with the Order Of Souls or Merchant Alliance through the way your ship and your pirate look. New weapons and items will also become available through these quests, and they should get tougher and more rewarding as you go.

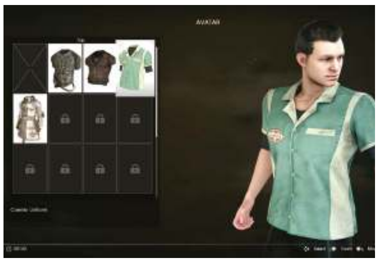


However, while there's a reputation system with each company, there is no official levelling system for each player in *Sea of Thieves*. That means that when a company gives you a mission you can take it to your crew and you can all venture out on that quest, regardless of how long they've been playing or how far along they are personally with that faction. You throw your parchment on the captain's table on the ship and everybody can see what it entails and what the rewards are likely to be. Then you each get to vote on what to do next and the mission with the most votes can be clearly seen and accepted by the crew. That said, you could just shout everyone else down and demand they go on your mission. That's probably fine too. *Sea of Thieves* really isn't trying to enforce too much structure on to how you go about playing the game.

Rare has said from the start that it wants players to create their own stories and for the game to become a living, breathing space for events to happen, rather than having a narrative driven by the studio. All of the systems and tools put in place right now look to be honouring that commitment. Thank goodness we don't have much longer to wait.

Blocking, healing and magic have all been tweaked to make more sense in an online team-based environment.

IS THIS FINAL FANTASY XV'S MOST PERPLEXING DLC UPDATE YET?



Above: There's a full and impressively detailed character customisation system, and you can buy new duds with your hard-earned cash.

→ HANDS-ON WITH COMRADES, SQUARE ENIX'S MULTIPLAYER GAMBLE

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE (NOW), PC (EARLY 2018)** | PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX** | DEVELOPER: **IN-HOUSE** | PLAYERS: **1-4 (ONLINE)** | RELEASE: **OUT NOW**

In Comrades, the multiplayer expansion for *Final Fantasy XV*, the world is already lost. Evil is victorious, and the last outposts of humanity are slowly blinking out of existence. The hero – Noctis, the protagonist of *FFXV* proper – is missing.

Rather than a macabre ending, Comrades treats this as a beginning, casting players as the last surviving members of the Kingsglaive, a royal guard sworn to protect the king and his people. What follows will be familiar to players of multiplayer RPGs like Destiny and Monster Hunter – co-operative online missions that task squads of players with defeating ferocious monsters. It's all backed up by some light RPG character progression.



Above: Plenty of FF iconography crops up, from battles with familiar monsters to cameos from major players in *FFXV*'s story. The main theme tune is even by classic FF maestro Nobuo Uematsu!

The fact that Comrades doesn't feel like a tacked-on stretch around *FFXV*'s narrative is impressive, and that carries through to much of its design. What you get up to is fun and satisfying with a predictable, matchmaking-friendly ebb and flow.

You pick up a mission brief in a hub zone, travel to a staging area to prep and then head out on the mission proper. If successful you'll return to camp to debrief and inventory your loot before heading back to the hub, where you can take on another mission – but not before you invest in new gear and upgrades or progress the story to unlock more missions.

It's all deceptively pleasing stuff, and at times it can be rather hard to believe that this has been built atop a game that was so plainly constructed with single-player in mind above all else.

Many of *FFXV*'s abilities and controls are tweaked to better fit a multiplayer setting. What was a dodge becomes an area-of-effect shield that can protect your teammates, for instance, while elemental magic is more limited to force a greater degree of pre-mission preparation. Battling larger creatures was one of the highlights of *FFXV*, and that still continues to ring true in a multiplayer setting where effective communication and strategy make a larger difference.

IN BRIEF
See the world of *Final Fantasy XV* in a new way, battling powerful monsters in four-player online co-operative missions

It's good stuff, then – though in places the scars of the surgery to graft multiplayer systems onto a single-player open world are painfully visible. Load times are intense as the game hops from zone to zone, matchmaking is frustratingly hit-and-miss, and in its current state the multiplayer feels curiously unfinished. It culminates in a battle that'll make hardcore FF fans squeal with glee, but the game also alludes to more missions in areas that aren't yet available to play.

Like *FFXV* at launch, Comrades feels like a great idea that needs a little more development. If Square Enix sticks to its guns with updates this could be a must-play in a few months' time.

HOW SPILT MILK STUDIOS BUILT AN MMO IN SIX WEEKS

→ WE CHAT TO ANDREW JOHN SMITH, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT SPILT MILK STUDIOS ABOUT LAZARUS' PROCEDURALLY GENERATED WORLDS

FORMAT: **PC** | PUBLISHER: **IMPROBABLE** | DEVELOPER: **SPILT MILK** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018** | PLAYERS: **MMO**

Lazarus is the result of a cool idea colliding with great technology. Developed by Spilt Milk Studios, *Lazarus* is a top-down, twin-stick shooter supported by thousands of players on a single-region shard; in a persistent real-time world players must fight together for territory and resources against a vicious alien threat. But here's the thing, every week the world resets entirely.

As the remnants of the old world are swept away a new, procedurally generated one is built in its place. While your weapons and upgrades can be reclaimed, your standing in the world can not. *Lazarus* is a war fought weekly, an MMO that keeps expanding and evolving. As Spilt Milk continues to move through early access, games™ sits down with creative director Andrew John Smith to understand how this ambitious project came to be.

Talk to us about *Lazarus*, what sort of game are we dealing with here?

At its highest level, *Lazarus* is a sci-fi action MMO. It's a twin-stick shooter where you're blasting asteroids and bad guys in this enormous world, fighting over territories, against different alien factions, and this is all happening whether you're online or not.

Is it a pure twin-stick shooter or are you layering in RPG elements?

We are layering on some Diablo action-RPG elements too; you've got skills and slots that you can equip to your ship, traditional videogamey good stuff. And through all that you are collecting, essentially, crates to open up alien space stations to get awesome skins, new systems – and upgrades for those systems – and new ships. And then, after that, it tends to get a bit more complicated the more you get into it.

How did the project come together?

It was pretty mad in the beginning. So, we approached Improbable with some ideas and they thought this one sounded cool. Back then, the elevator pitch was just: *Asteroids* the MMO. Lets make something that everybody understands, it'll have mass appeal, and it'll be something that you'll be able to hop into and have a little play – it felt like there was a market for that, and one that wasn't very well served.

We are all very experienced in Unity and SpatialOS [Improbable's proprietary development platform] was working very well with Unity, so we just went into the office and four of us just slammed it for six weeks.

It took six weeks to build an MMO?

That's all it took to literally get the fundamentals: moving, shooting, different weapons; we had hundreds of thousands, millions of asteroids, it was really mental. To the point where it was a little bit too much, but we just wanted to ramp it up and see where we could go.

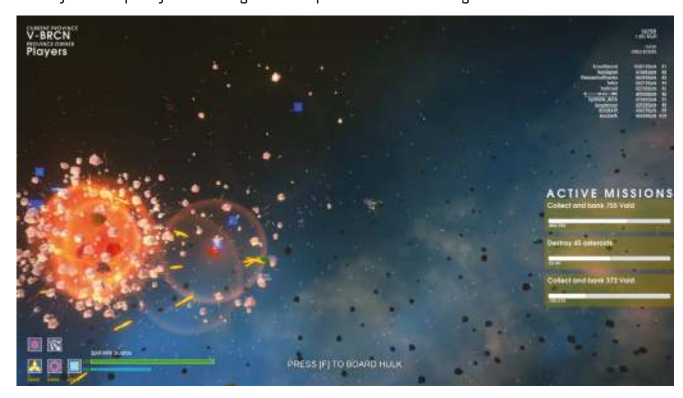
And in six weeks we had this playable thing; in the first week we had two people playing it, it was just a case of where do we go from here, right? It has just rolled from there and grown and grown.

What does working with SpatialOS bring to the project?

It's sort of a cloud solution for massively multiplayer shared worlds. But it basically means you can run multiple versions of the engine you are using in the cloud, and then it manages the sending of information between each of them. The awesome bit is that it just handles the passing of information over in a completely seamless way, so that's why you can have these enormous bloody worlds; *Lazarus* is 160km squared or something ridiculous.



Above: While the combat is simple, the rush of excitement comes from trying to retain territory and weapon systems. Losing them in a persistent world is a nightmare.



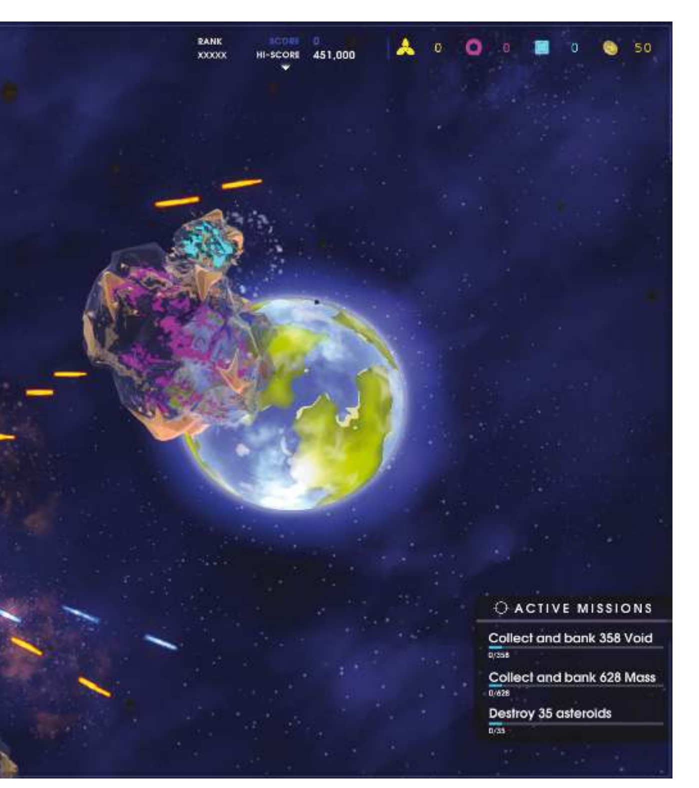




Below: Unlike most traditional MMOs, the thrust of *Lazarus* isn't on earning XP but on levelling up systems and weapons, and these can be retained after the weekly world wipe.



Below: *Lazarus* is moving steadily through Early Alpha and we've enjoyed what we've played so far. The weekly world reset is novel and keeps the game feeling fresh.



Why does *Lazarus* require something like SpatialOS to work?

The fiction of it is that we have expanded out into the stars and we encounter an alien threat that is just completely unbeatable; this mysterious alien tech allows us to make better fighters and stand up to them but that just ends up in a deadlock… they are complete lunatics so they just blow up the universe.

The alien tech that you find, the aliens that are responsible for that would rather the world didn't end, so are going to reset and give humanity another chance. So that's the idea; every week they are resetting the universe and whether you win or fail you get another go and the world will be different, it is built procedurally every week.

You get to play with different systems and different setups, I guess it's sort of like a Rogue-like for the whole community. The whole world resets, it's not just some arbitrary 'oh the territory is just in a different layout'… it means something.

So do you lose everything ever week or is there some persistence?

Every time you die and every week, your current loadout is removed; you're dead and you start out with the basics. But every system or weapon that you've unlocked will stay unlocked forever, and any levels that you've unlocked on it are permanent, so you do get a sense of progression.

How do players reclaim items after the weekly wipe?

The space stations you visit to unlock your crates are actually shops, of all kinds of stuff. They are also the control points for the territories… but when you shop there, as the world is beginning, they basically roll for what stock that they have from the entire breadth in the game. So you don't know what it has in stock until you dock, and that's what it's got for that entire week. So you might spawn in, be near a shop but it might not have your favourite weapon – have stock that you've never levelled up – so in a sense you are forced to try new stuff, but at the same time there will hopefully be player-driven stories where, if your favourite gun is behind enemy lines, there is going to be a battle to get to the station and access it.

With something like *World Of Warcraft*, it's a great game and it's super polished, but you are all very much doing the same content and there is a best way to do it. Whereas with this we can make that a bit more interesting. Part of why we did the weekly wipe is because it allows us to exaggerate and reinforce that in a really meaningful way – if it never reset the game would just sort of stagnate.

IN BRIEF

Fight for your life alongside thousands of other players in a world constantly on the brink of absolute destruction

With all of this handled in the cloud, the game continues even when you're not there, right?

It's what allows us to have all of these AI working and all of these factions working and fighting together whether you're there or not. Something we really want to add is persistent debris from all fights, so all the hulks and all the smashed out remnants of ships will be there – you could have been off in a different corner for the past three days, come across some stuff and be like 'what on earth happened here?'

But that's what's cool about the weekly reset. It means you always get the cool bit again; the beginning it's discovery, the middle of your week is embedding into the world and figuring out what you want to do, and then there will always be the big climactic battle at the end. We just hope it's awesome to do and that people want to do it over and over.

IN BRIEF
Lara Croft continues her journey, mastering her survival skills and thirst for adventure

WHAT WE WANT TO SEE FROM SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER

→ LARA'S RETURN HAS BEEN CONFIRMED, BUT WHERE SHOULD THE REBOOTED SERIES HEAD NEXT?

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX** | DEVELOPER: **CRYSTAL DYNAMICS, EIDOS MONTREAL** | RELEASE: **TBC 2018** | PLAYERS: **1-TBC**



LARA TAKING CHARGE

1 The Tomb Raider reboot saw a young Lara having to survive against the odds, and *Rise* had her recovering from that experience and reconciling her feelings and memories of her father. As much as we quite like the personal journey that Lara has been on over these games, we've been waiting for more of that classic, brash character to emerge. Now may be the time.



KEEP IT MYSTICAL

2 We've enjoyed some of the supernatural elements that the series has embraced in the last couple of games and we're keen to see that continue. One of the great things about Lara is her adaptability and wits. Bullets and arrows may get the job done most of the time, but when she faces something otherworldly, it offers a new kind of test.



DUAL WIELDING

3 This new incarnation of Lara is as synonymous with her bow as the classic Lara was with her twin silver shooters, but we can't help but want to see her dual-wielding those guns again. Lara's ambidextrous nature is one of the many things that makes her unique and it would be good to lean on that again. We've had a glimpse, but we could stand to see more.



LEAN INTO THE OPEN WORLD

4 The open, almost Metroid-style island of *Tomb Raider* was something pretty special and really helped this rebooted series stand out from its closest competitor, Uncharted. With Naughty Dog stepping back a little from its adventurous treasure-hunter, this is a good opportunity to double-down on that sandbox design as a unique selling point for the series.

NEW GAMES ROUNDUP

➔ SOME OF THE INTERESTING NEW TITLES TO ADD TO YOUR WATCH LIST



IN THE VALLEY OF GODS

FORMAT: **PC** | DEV: **CAMPO SANTO** | ETA: **TBC 2019**

Set in the 1920s, *In The Valley Of Gods* is very much in the same vein as Campo Santo's debut release, *Firewatch*, except instead of being a warden in a forest you're an explorer and filmmaker attempting to uncover a mysterious secret in ancient Egyptian ruins. Much like its last game, Campo Santo is creating another gorgeously rendered world here, and given this studio's pedigree we're excited.



GTFO

FORMAT: **PC** | DEV: **DISRUPTIVE GAMES** | ETA: **TBC 2018**

With the designer from *Payday* and *Payday 2* as well as a writer from *The Last Of Us*, *GTFO* would be attention grabbing with its staff alone, but the fact that it promises a procedurally generated four-player co-op shooter experience that looks like part *Alien* and part *Left 4 Dead* takes things up another level. *GTFO* also has its own Expedition Director, throwing new challenges and new rewards at you. It's intense stuff.



WITCHFIRE

FORMAT: **TBC** | DEV: **THE ASTRONAUTS** | ETA: **TBC 2018**

The reveal of *Witchfire* was a wonderful bait and switch, as it teased something close to its mystery game *The Vanishing Of Ethan Carter* and then turned it on its head with a game more like some of the development team's former projects, like *Painkiller* and *Bulletstorm*. *Witchfire* is a monstrous horror shooter that looks absolutely stunning in its world design and atmosphere. Think Doom, but through a Gothic filter.



DONUT COUNTY

FORMAT: **PS4, PC, IOS** | DEV: **BEN ESPOSITO** | ETA: **TBC 2017**

This game falls pretty firmly under the umbrella of 'things **games™** was bound to fall in love with', with its nods to Katamari gameplay and seemingly knowing sense of humour. What you do in this game is move a hole around to swallow objects on the ground and the more you gobble up, the bigger the hole gets. Simple and effective stuff when combined with puzzles and objectives. And it's pretty cute too.



FANTASY STRIKE

FORMAT: **PS4, PC** | DEV: **SIRLIN GAMES** | ETA: **TBC 2018**

Aiming to simplify fighters while also retaining enough depth for it to exist on the competitive scene, Sirlin Games has set itself a tough task for *Fantasy Strike*. Smart gameplay choices, like making throw counters automatic if you don't touch the controls and making supers a single button press, means the action should be accessible to anyone. It may be too simple for hardcore fighting fans, but we're intrigued.



MOTHERGUNSHIP

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | ETA: **TBC 2018**
DEV: **TERRIBLE POSTURE GAMES, GRIP DIGITAL**

Mothergunship's most interesting selling point is a gun-crafting mechanic that lets you make some truly insane armaments, like a gun with barrels that surround your field of view and fire in unison. The ships you board and attack are procedurally made so the challenge will always be new, and the gun you need to finish the job can be just as variable.



THE CHURCH IN THE DARKNESS

FORMAT: **PS4, XBOX ONE, PC** | ETA: **TBC 2018**
DEV: **PARANOID PRODUCTIONS**

Offering a stealth, infiltration experience that harkens back to classic Metal Gear, you play *The Church In The Darkness* as a former law-enforcement officer trying to check on the safety of your nephew who you fear has been taken in by a religious cult in South America. Lethal and non-lethal approaches are possible, so it's really all up to you.



“I just remember thinking *‘holy shit,* that was amazing!’”

DAN HAY, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, FAR CRY 5

WHY I ♥...

BIOSHOCK

DAN HAY
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, FAR CRY 5

A game that I just love, it's got to be BioShock. *I just love* BioShock, *love it. Right from the very beginning – from that moment of being on the plane, and then being in the water, and then going down into this world – it felt very curated and very designed, but it also felt very smart and very futuristic.*

The storytelling was great. The game leveraged what we already know of ourselves: a fear of isolation, a fear of the dark and a fear of being manipulated. I think that game kept on delivering too; it was clean and it was elegant, but it wasn't simple. From great art design to great set design, it kept on delivering… it just felt like there was a very sharp mind at the helm of that experience. When it was over I just remember thinking 'holy shit, that was amazing!' not as a game, but as an experience. That's a game I keep on going back to.





HOW TO

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO BOOSTING YOUR GAMING EXPERIENCE, LEARNING NEW SKILLS AND GETTING INTO THE GAMES INDUSTRY

Welcome to the How To special feature where we'll break down some of the amazing things you can do in gaming and how you can do them. We've more or less broken down the following feature into three sections; Play, Learn and Work.

In Play we'll tell you about ways of improving your gaming experience and reach out to the gaming community at large in new ways. In Learn we'll look at skills and interests you might be able to turn into something a bit more. And in Work we talk to industry veterans and experts in some of the key roles around the business to demystify how games are made and maybe inspire you to take up game-making yourself.

So, we hope you enjoy this special feature and you pick up a thing or two from reading it.

HOW TO BE A GAMER IN 2018

The landscape of gaming has shifted. There are more people than ever before engaged in interactive entertainment, and it's time to rethink the way we handle ourselves in online communities and as gamers of the world. With more eyes than ever on our favourite pastime, we are all responsible for helping to build, maintain and manage a better environment.



JOIN A COMMUNITY

1 Videogames are increasingly focused towards multiplayer and cooperative experiences and that shows no signs changing. And so, perhaps more so than ever before, it's important to find a like-minded group of players to roll through these virtual worlds with – expand your horizons, join a community, and experience these games the way they are intended.

LEARN THE RULES

2 If you are going to join a community – ResetEra, game-specific subreddits and Discord channels are great places to start – make sure you learn and respect its rules. Listen, everybody is just trying to have a good time; a little mutual respect goes a long way. If you don't like a community, you don't have to engage with it – there's always another to found or founded.

INVEST IN A MICROPHONE

3 Given the shift towards shared-world experiences, it is more important than ever before to invest in a quality microphone. Many (if not most) games come with in-built party systems; communication isn't just a gimmick, it's an integral part of the flow and function of the industry's biggest titles.

LISTEN TO OTHERS

4 Of course, having a microphone is one thing – having the confidence to use it is another entirely. Communication is a powerful tool, and it should be used to converse with your teammates, talk tactics and revel in the chaos of a game together. What is this, 2005? Leave the shit talking at the door already.

HOW CAN WE PLAY OUR PARTS AS GAMERS IN AN EVER-GROWING COMMUNITY TO ENSURE THAT THE PASTIME REMAINS RESPECTFUL, INCLUSIVE AND ABOVE ALL, FUN?

KNOW WHEN TO MUTE

5 Here's a small list of things we don't want to hear coming out of your microphone in 2018: you talking to your housemate about something unrelated to the game; you arguing with your parents/significant other/household pet [delete as applicable]; screaming children; and tinny, distorted music – this is why the mute button was invented.

PLAY THE OBJECTIVE

6 Honestly, if everybody just played multiplayer games in the way that they were designed to be played we would all have a better time; that isn't speculation, it's just a straight up fact. If you're playing an objective-based game, play the damned objective. It isn't difficult, at least it shouldn't be.

DON'T QUIT OUT

7 It sucks to lose. We've all been there and it's never a good feeling to know that you're being totally crushed by somebody else around the world. Does that mean you should let your impatience get the best of you and quit out, ruining the thrill for the opposing team and making life a misery for your teammates? Absolutely not. Take it on the chin, observe the play, and try to learn something from it.

REPORT THOSE THAT DO

8 Playing with somebody that is actively trying to disrupt a game, being rude and unruly, or quitting out when the going gets tough? Don't forget that most games (and hardware platforms) have in-built and robust reporting systems. If somebody is trying to spoil your fun, don't forget to report them for it.

INTERMEDIATE

BE RESPECTFUL

1 We can't state this enough: be respectful. Be respectful to everybody. The gaming industry is bigger than it has ever been and that growth shows no sign of letting up – we are all responsible for its perception in the wider world. Be kind, be helpful, and share your expertise with others – who knows who you might meet and befriend along the way.

ENGAGE IN THE CHANGE

2 We've been heading in this direction for a few years now, but games are finally starting to grow up. And with that, it's time for us all to accept and embrace the waves of titles that offer up games as an experience, not as a challenge. Honestly, this doesn't mean Call Of Duty and FIFA are going anywhere, only that they will be flanked by more varied experiences on the storefront.

TRY DIFFERENT GAMES

3 There are a lot of games out there in the world. If you find yourself getting bored or frustrated by the stuff in your current library, why not try something new? Steam, GOG and Humble Bundle sales are great ways to pick up cheap games, as too are services such as EA Access, Games With Gold/PlayStation Plus, and Xbox Game Pass.

DON'T USE ANONYMITY AS A SHIELD

4 In the earliest days of the internet, a culture of shit talking was formed around the shield of anonymity. If you can't get caught, what does it matter what you say or how you act, right? Wrong. Hiding behind an online handle isn't an excuse for acting out; you're responsible for your actions and for the way said action make others feel.

CHANGE YOUR VOCABULARY

5 We all get frustrated from time to time. Getting taken to town online will probably foster some ill feeling – and sometimes it's good to express yourself and let your frustration be heard. And look, we aren't suggesting you need to stop swearing but there is no excuse for the use of homophobic, gendered or racially charged language. Be more imaginative with your venting, please.

DON'T FEED THE TROLLS

6 The sad truth is that there are some people out there just looking for a reaction – don't give them the satisfaction. If these sad head cases don't have anything better to do than get their kicks from making others enraged, you should do your best to not engage. If you hear somebody going out of their way to be offensive, report them, mute them and move on; it's also okay to feel a little sorry for them, we sure do.

YES, DIFFERENT PEOPLE PLAY

7 Recent studies have suggested that more women than teenage boys are gamers out there in the world – the latter just tend to be louder and more voracious about letting you know that they are there. Everybody plays games now, and that's awesome; celebrate it already! Skill or capability in a videogame isn't denoted by gender, race or any other metric, so don't bring it up.

ADVANCED

CONTROL THE RAGE

1 There is no such thing as a 'heated gaming moment'. If you find that people are getting overly emotional, angry or aggressive when the going gets tough in a virtual world, it isn't the game's fault. Many of us have let loose, thrown a controller, or switched a console off in a strop when the going gets tough, but controlling that is important. Other people shouldn't need to be responsible for your actions. Remind people that they should act their age; hell, they might even like it!

DON'T IGNORE HARASSMENT

2 Playing videogames is supposed to be fun. It can be competitive, tense, spellbinding and all encompassing, but it should be fun above all else – and it should be fun for everybody. Videogames give us a window into different worlds, let us experience things we could never do otherwise, and that space should be safe and inclusive. Everybody should be able to play without fear or trepidation. It's on all of us – each and every one of us – to foster a better environment for play; harassment has no place in gaming, and we are all responsible for building better communities.

CALL PEOPLE OUT

3 The sad thing is, some people that play games (not you, you're lovely) are intent on causing trouble. We know that it can be difficult to stick your neck out for other people – particularly strangers – but the only way gaming spaces become more inclusive, friendly and fun to be in is if you start calling out harassment when you hear it. The longer gendered, homophobic or racial slurs get used uncontested, the more likely it is somebody impressionable will hear it go unchallenged and roll it into their vocabulary. We all have a role to play in this.

THINK LOCALLY AND ACT GLOBALLY

4 It's 2018: we should be building things up, not tearing them down. Think about how you like people to engage, and treat, you locally – in your general day to day – and extrapolate that to the global playing stage of online multiplayer, social media and forums. Harassment and toxicity are among the worst aspects of the industry and it needs to stop; there's simply no excuse for it anymore, in any form. Videogames are for everybody and with 2018 offering such a broad array of experiences, anybody should be able to pick up a controller in expectation of a good time. Play, have fun and don't engage in the worst parts of the culture in order to be a better gamer in 2018.

SUPERCHARGE YOUR GAME SETUP

SOME EASY WAYS TO TURN YOUR LIVING ROOM OR GAMING SPACE INTO SOMETHING SPECIAL

We've moved beyond the days when a gaming setup was as simplistic as plugging your chosen machine into the back of a TV. We can and we should do better than that, and it really doesn't take much to elevate your experience. Here are some quick and easy tips to give you an instant improvement…

CONCENTRATE ON SOUND

1 How's your audio? From our experience, it's the one element of the gaming experience many seem to forget, and it can be easily solved. Surround sound systems would be the ideal solution, but even a soundbar under your TV (the tech for which has advanced massively in recent years) is a good option. There's no need to spend much more than £100 on it, with some good options from Sony and Samsung in that price range.

HEADPHONES WORK WONDERS

2 Making too much noise might be a bigger concern of course, so headphones should be seriously considered. There are a bunch of Dolby Atmos-enabled headsets around for Xbox One X players looking for a little boost. The Turtle Beach Stealth 700 headphones are wireless and pretty great for PS4 and Xbox One as one example. And since the Xbox One updated its ganepad, you don't need an additional plug to listen through headphones jacked into your controller, so that's pretty handy.

TIME FOR A BLACKOUT

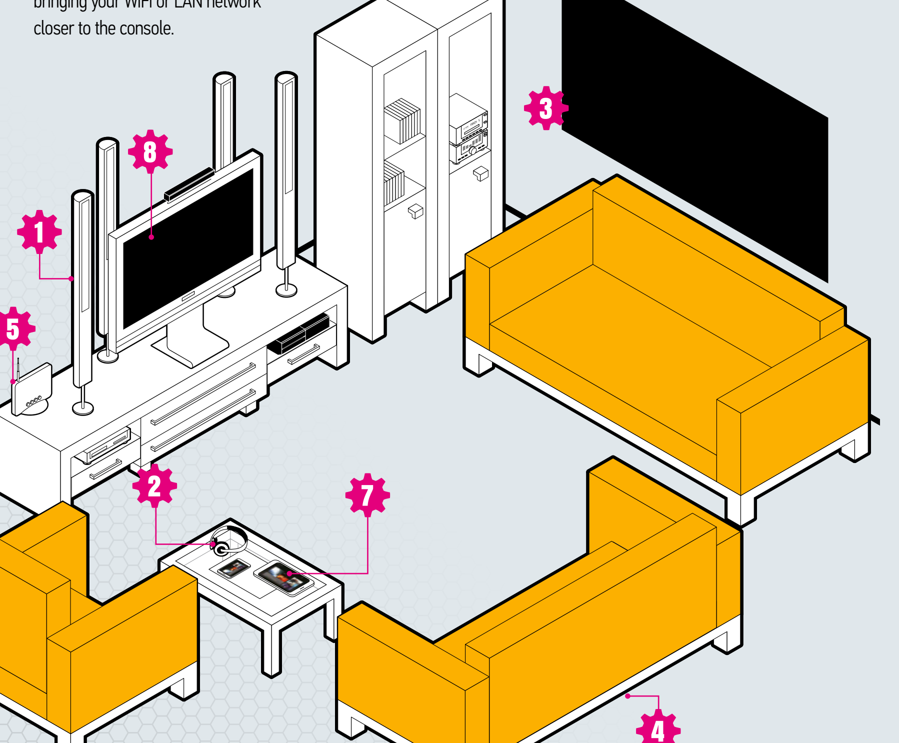
3 Okay, let's talk about curtains. Seriously, having some window coverings can really enhance your gaming experience. Whether you have blinds or an old shirt hooked over the rail, being able to blackout the windows for an intense gaming session can be very handy. With only the TV emitting light into the room, the intensity of the experience and the focus it affords will feel very different. It's the same reason why they turn off the lights in cinemas. Everything just feels more immediate this way.

WHERE ARE YOU SITTING?

4 Happy on your sofa? That's cool. It might be a really comfy one, and perhaps pulling a dedicated gaming chair into the room is going to rub some people up the wrong way. How about a bean bag though? We have to say, we love a bean bag for playing games in. It couldn't be more comfy, it can be moved around with ease and it's not going to be intrusive for the general living-room vibe. In fact, you might need to fight others for time in its warm embrace.

BRING THE WIFI CLOSER

5 Hopefully you have your router as close to your consoles as possible for online gaming. Ideally they should be plugged in directly rather than over WiFi. If not, then you should give serious consideration to bringing your router into the living room to help with your connection clarity. You could also consider a WiFi extender in the room to give the signal a little boost. Something like the TP-Link powerline extenders we tested in **games™** 178, for example, offer a smart and efficient solution to bringing your WiFi or LAN network closer to the console.





EXTRA CONTROLLERS ARE A MUST, WHATEVER YOUR CONSOLE

DOCK TO RECHARGE

6 In this day and age you shouldn't be picking up a controller and finding that it's out of juice. There's simply no excuse. Oddly, it's been one of the side effects of the Nintendo Switch that has reawakened us to appreciate the humble charging dock as an essential living room booster. There are plenty of first and third party options around that offer a tidy and efficient way of making sure your controllers are fully charged every time you need them.

CONSIDER YOUR SECOND SCREEN

7 The use of second screen apps for games has more or less fallen out of favour, but there are a few exceptions. The PS4 second screen experience was recently relaunched as a dedicated app allowing for some control of the console. And there's PlayLink, too, that sees you use your smartphone as a controller. The Xbox app is similarly useful, with store info and commands you can send to your device. It's a good idea to get your smart devices linked up to see what else you can do with it all.

TWEAK YOUR TV SETTINGS

8 So you bought a TV with input lag below 35ms we're hoping… but whether you did or didn't there are still things you can do to make sure your TV is as well optimised for gaming as possible. Most new sets have a game picture preset option, which is intended to improve input lag. If the colour doesn't look right, don't assume the worst. That's a small thing that can be tweaked and improved in the menus pretty easily. Input lag is much more important in this instance.

AND SOME OTHER THINGS...

9 There are so many more things that will give your console an instant boost, like picking up an external hard drive (2TB drives don't cost too much these days). Keyboard and mouse support are typically available now too, which will make searching Netflix a lot easier if nothing else. PS4 remote play still works a charm for extending your game access to other rooms, and Steambox does vice-versa for you if you don't have your PC plugged into the TV. On a simpler level, try tidying up all those wires behind your TV with some zip-ties. Seriously, it can do wonders. And finally, a new controller is like slipping into fresh bedsheets. If you're using the same one from launch, consider an upgrade.

■ These guys clearly didn't get the memo about having more seating options available for multiplayer sessions. Seriously, get some bean bags.

WHERE TO BUY

Getting a good deal can be tough. For TVs we would always recommend getting a first-hand look at an operating set before purchase, even if you don't buy it on the spot. You can always find a deal online later. For other tech choices our pals at TechRadar.com have pages and pages of excellent reviews to help.

GET STARTED WITH REDSTONE IN MINECRAFT

IT'S THE GAME'S MOST POWERFUL TOOL, IF YOU KNOW HOW



AUTOMATED FIREWORKS DISPLAY

This is a nice simple one to get started. Embed five dispensers in the ground with a gap between each (look down into the hole to place them pointing upwards) and fill them with fireworks. Then trail redstone dust to a block with a switch on it: that's your power source. For some added flair, add repeaters set to different timings to stagger the release.



REDSTONE LADDER

Getting your redstone circuit up a wall or steep surface can be tricky. Stair-like structures are no trouble, but for something more sheer you need this 'ladder' system. Place slabs in an alternating pattern on the top half of the adjacent block and then paint with redstone dust. This should keep the circuit going up a wall without any issues.



CHEST INDICATOR

This little trick essentially tells you how full a chest is with lights on the floor, which is handy if you've set up some auto-farming or smelting contraption. Using a comparator pointing away from the chest, simply line up 16 redstone lamps and paint them with redstone dust. As the chest fills with 64 stacked items in each slot it will light up the chain of lamps.

IMPROVE YOUR VR SETUP

ON PSVR, VIVE OR RIFT, THESE ARE SOME GOOD TIPS TO FOLLOW

Whatever VR devices you might be using there are some general rules of thumb that should help to improve your experience. The more high-end your setup the more space and power you're going to need, of course, but beyond that these ideas should instantly make your VR life better.

PRACTICAL THINKING

We've said a number of times that as exciting and immersive as VR can be, price and space are really the two biggest barriers to entry. We've largely concentrated on the PSVR here as it represents the best experience for price and practicality on the market right now. However, if you have the resources, PC-based VR is still the way to go. Some key considerations though if you go in this direction: Can you dedicate a room to VR? If you can, that can be amazing. Do you want to screw the VR sensors into the walls or place them on tripods? Either will work, but tripods do allow for a more mobile and adjustable setup. And how about headphones? The visual immersion is great, but 360-degree audio on top of that is kind of essential to get the most from these devices.

1

2

3

4

A QUESTION OF LIGHTING

1 Be aware of the line of sight for any cameras you're using. With PSVR you want to make sure there are no light emitting sources in view of the lens, as this is how the camera tracks your head and controller movements. Generally speaking a darker room is also better. If you have blinds or curtains you can close, make that happen.

THINK ABOUT YOUR VERTICALITY

2 Whether you're using PSVR, Vive or Rift, using some height in your camera and sensor position can do the world of good. With the PlayStation Eye camera, you want it at least at head height so it can get a good look at the room. It will show you its view of the room on-screen, so move around and make sure it can always see you.

GIVE YOURSELF SOME ROOM

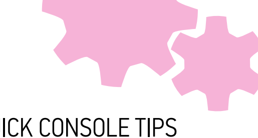
3 We're leaning on the PSVR here as it's the most common kit to use, but it recommends a clear playing space of around six by ten feet. That means enough space to lie down in front of the camera and plenty of room to your sides. And make sure the coffee table is well clear. We speak from experience, you will trip over it eventually.

THE LITTLE EXTRAS HELP

4 Consider picking up some small quality-of-experience extras, like a bandana for under the headset (keeps hair from getting caught up in it), a microfibre cloth for the lenses, and a stand for the headset to rest. Having a place for it will save it from getting too beaten up or its wires getting tangled with others.

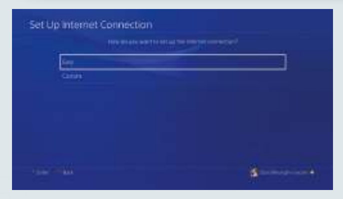


GET THE MOST FROM YOUR CONSOLE



QUICK CONSOLE TIPS FOR PS4, XBOX ONE AND NINTENDO SWITCH

PLAYSTATION 4



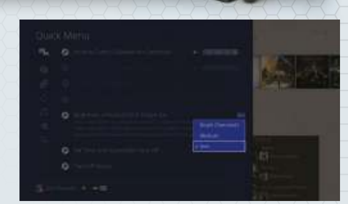
BOOST YOUR CONNECTION SPEED

Connection speeds on PS4 aren't as fast as they should be by default, so go into Settings > Network > Set Up Internet Connection then select your connection type. Now select Custom, set IP Address Settings to Automatic, DHCP Host Name to Do Not Specify, DNS Settings to Manual and enter your Primary DNS as '8.8.8.8' and the Secondary DNS as '8.8.4.4'.



CREATE A CUSTOM SOUNDTRACK

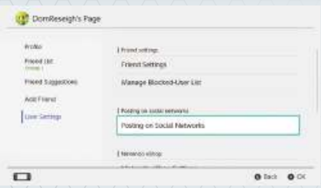
Link your PS4 to your Spotify account by ensuring both your console and your smartphone/tablet are all on the same Wi-Fi network. Download the Spotify app on PS4, then play a song on your phone/tablet. You'll now be able to access your music from your console, just hold the PS button and change tracks from there.



PRESERVE DS4 BATTERY LIFE

Sick and tired of seeing your DualShock 4 constantly running out of battery? Well, try this trick on for size. Open up the Quick Menu by holding the PS button, then select Sound/Devices. From the submenu, select Brightness of DUALSHOCK 4 Light Bar and change this setting to Dim. Your DS4 will now last a lot longer.

SWITCH



USE FACEBOOK

There's a hidden internet browser in Switch that will enable you to access and interact with your own FB page. To find it, go to your profile then User Settings > Posting to Social Media and hit Link. Just make sure you've linked your Switch to FB first before attempting this. And there's your timeline, on Switch no less.



SYNC TV POWER

To turn your TV on every time Switch boots up is easy and a great way to jump back into the tabletop action even faster. Go to System Settings > TV Settings and change Match TV Power State to On. Now, much like PS4 and Xbox One, your Switch and your TV are linked even closer than ever.



USE USB KEYBOARDS

As part of its numerous updates in 2017, Nintendo patched in the ability to use almost any make of USB keyboard with Switch. It can only be used when Switch is docked (and the keyboard itself plugged directly into the Dock), but it makes text input for the likes of social media posting a lot easier.

XBOX ONE



SMARTPHONE/TABLET CONTROL

If you need to use the virtual keyboard on your Xbox One, but don't want the hassle of using your controller, download the SmartGlass app for your smartphone. Once you're logged in, select Connect from the main screen, choose your Xbox and you can write messages, view screenshots and more.



PLAY XBOX GAMES ON PC

To stream games from your Xbox to your Windows 10 PC, go to Settings > Preferences on your Xbox and enable both 'Allow game streaming to other devices' and 'Enable the SmartGlass connection for any SmartGlass device'. Choose a game from the Xbox app on PC and select 'Stream from console'.



SPED UP INSTALLS

Game installation takes way too long so speed up the process by disconnecting your Xbox from the internet (Settings > Network > Go offline). Now insert your disc and the install file will download a lot faster. This is due to a legacy issue involving the 'always online' feature when Xbox was launched.

EARN FREE COINS IN FIFA ULTIMATE TEAM

NO NEED TO SPLASH YOUR OWN CASH SO LONG AS YOU HAVE THE TIME



COIN BOOST

Did you know there's a way to instantly earn more coins from playing games? More seasoned players will know it well. Just click in the Right Stick and you'll open the EA Football Club rewards you've been earning. Some apply coin bonuses for playing matches.



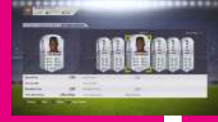
ONLINE LEAGUES

With coin boost activated you should be able to earn additional coins for every five to ten matches you complete. It should mean about 600 coins for a win and even more if you start picking up division promotions. Hopefully you've got the skills to make this work.



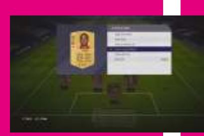
DRAFT MODE

If you believe in yourself and your FIFA skills then Draft Mode is an amazing way to earn masses of coins. It takes a 15,000 coin entry fee, but if you win you will earn plenty of coins back and unlock card packs that can be integrated into your squad or sold on.



PLAY THE MARKET

You'll need some cash to get this going, but once you have the funds look at buying up players from key leagues in key positions that often need filling (Fullbacks seem to be a good pick). Go a few pages deep in your search and make some low bids to grab some bargains.



SELL HIGH

Now, you could put players on the open market and take your chances, but if you've picked up some bargain players you may as well sell at the average Buy Now prices, making some quick bucks from players who need a position filled quick. Then reinvest the cash.

SURVIVE TO THE FINAL FIVE IN PUBG

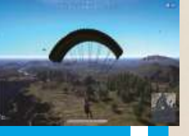
THE FINAL CHICKEN DINNER PLAY WE LEAVE TO YOU

LEARN THE MAPS



This seems pretty obvious, but we're really concerned with two key points here; useful items and names. Check out the fan communities for guides to weapon and vehicle drops, and memorise some key low-congestion spots you can rely on. Also, learn the names of the key areas, as this will really help navigation in team play.

TRY LOSING A BIT



In *PUBG*, stealth is always the winning strategy, but as a result it can be very easy to neglect the game's shooting mechanics. A few rounds spent deliberately heading to populated centres for shooting practice could pay off in the long run when you finally need to face someone down in the final moments of the game.

HUG THE EDGES



Using the map and the closing circles to your positional advantage makes a lot of sense, as it cuts down on the amount of space you need to be concerned with. You're unlikely to be attacked from the coastal regions, so hugging them makes sense. What's more, the edges of the safe zone should be the least populated for most of the game.

ALWAYS ASSUME DANGER



Don't stand in front of doors when opening them; always run from cover to cover out in the open, and clear buildings before gathering loot. In essence, assume there is someone watching and/or waiting to kill you at all times. It will cut down on the chances of someone getting the drop on you.

USE HEADPHONES



The sound design in *PUBG* is really excellent, which means you'll be able to locate other players far more effectively if you make use of headphones. Gunfire is obviously a key thing to listen out for, but even footsteps and vehicles can be heard once you're in close range.

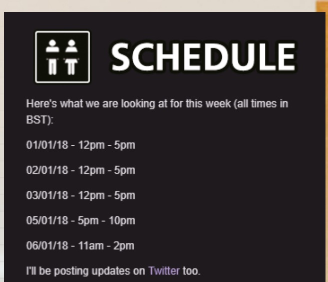
MASTER TWITCH STREAMING

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM YOUR GAMING BROADCASTING

INDIVIDUALITY

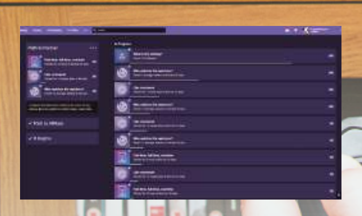
1 If you want to become a master Twitch streamer, you will first have to decide what you want to focus on in your streams. Are you interested in a particular game or franchise? Maybe you're an esports-level *Overwatch* player, or you simply want to work through your backlog. A lot of people use this platform, so think about a unique aspect that will set your stream apart from others. Some streamers cosplay or have a 'Twitch character' that they will assume while streaming. Standing out from the sea of other streamers will ultimately pave your way to success.





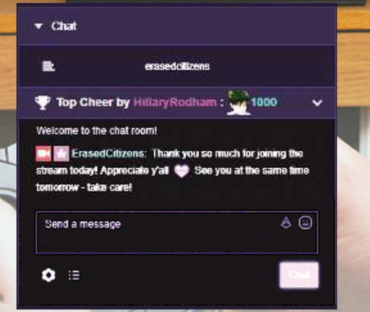
CONSISTENCY AND SCHEDULING

2 As a Twitch streamer, consistency and organisation will play a significant part in growing your channel. Before you start, think about how many hours you'll be able to dedicate to streaming. Draft up a schedule and, more importantly, stick to it. Not only will this help you to organise your week and ensure that you can fit streaming in around your other commitments, but it will also make it a lot easier for your viewers to tune in. People will be far more likely to return to your stream if they know when you'll be live, and streaming consistently at specific times shows your commitment.



SET ACHIEVABLE GOALS

3 Becoming a Twitch Affiliate or Partner doesn't happen overnight, so don't expect to ascend to super-streamer status straight off the bat. Whether you're just starting out, or have been streaming for a while and want to up your game, you'll want to start setting some goals to work towards. Don't feel discouraged if you aren't able to smash your targets straight away. Consider incorporating some of your goals into your stream overlay so that your viewers can see what your aspirations are. Many streamers will display follower, subscriber and donation counters, which track viewer activity during their streams. These can encourage your audience to help you reach your goals.



APPRECIATE YOUR AUDIENCE

4 Popular streamers would never have succeeded without their audience, so keep this in mind every time you stream. Try to be open, friendly and talkative when streaming, as this will encourage your viewers to be more active and want to chat to you. Keeping a positive attitude even when Twitch chat is moving slowly will help to boost viewer engagement, and will strengthen your relationship with your viewers. Be prepared to talk to yourself if Twitch chat is really quiet. In addition, show how grateful you are that your audience are there with you, and always thank them for their ongoing support.



UTILISE EVERY TOOL

5 Twitch frequently adds new features to help its streamers; do not ignore them! Twitch Clips enable you to highlight specific moments from your stream archive, and the Achievements and Stream Summary pages have been added for tracking progress. The 'Communities' discovery tool will also help you to connect with your target audience more directly. Want to focus on speed runs? Join the Speedrunning community so your audience can locate your stream easier. As your channel becomes more popular, you may also want to use features like Subscriber-Only chat to encourage a sense of loyalty and community.

STAY CONNECTED

6 You may be well on your way to mastering Twitch streaming, but you also have a life that exists outside of streaming too. Editing the panels on your channel page to include links to your social media accounts will enable your audience to follow you on other platforms. We recommend that you tweet every time you stream and share your Twitch Clips to maximise your presence online. Following other streamers is also an excellent way to make friends and potentially grow even further if you ever decide to collaborate or host one another.

EXPERT HELP

DANE HEARTHSTONE ON FINDING YOUR STREAMING STYLE

"For newcomers I think it's important to approach streaming with a question in mind: How am I going to be entertaining?

"Establishing a format and playing to your strengths will allow you to focus and build your stream, be it you are naturally funny or an expert at a certain game. Make sure the format is right for you, because this is what you will be known for, and it can be difficult to change later down the line."

FIND YOUR TEAM IN DESTINY 2

GET THE RIGHT CLAN OR FIRETEAM TOGETHER

FIND A NEW CLAN



Finding the right group of players to experience *Destiny 2* with is so important, and you can browse the Bungie forums for lots of posts looking for new members. You should also check out www.the100.io, which is an amazing tool for finding clans based on times they play and their approach to the game.

BUILD YOUR OWN CLAN



Can't find a group that speaks to you? Then make your own. The Create Clan tools on bungie.net couldn't be simpler to use as you come up with a name, motto and About Us description. Here's your chance to pitch the kind of community you want to play with.

PROMOTE YOURSELF



If you've set up a clan, you need to get the world out there. The Bungie forums are, again, a good place to start. But you could also consider setting up some social media profiles, and perhaps even a website for your group if you want to see it expand. Check out what Avalanche UK did with its clan community (it even has merch).

MAYBE TRY A FIRETEAM



If a clan is all a little bit much in the commitment stakes, perhaps a fireteam is what you're really in need of. No worries there either, as the Bungie forums have a dedicated fireteam request system for finding players who can meet your needs, numbers and playstyle.

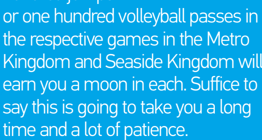
BE CLEAR AND SPECIFIC



When trying to form a group or attract players, be clear and specific about what you're looking for. What skills do you want someone to bring to the table? Are there any interests outside of gaming that you would like your team to share? Details can really help.

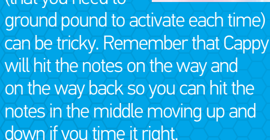
GET THE HARDEST SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY POWER MOONS

SOME QUICK GUIDES TO MARIO'S HOTTEST COLLECTIBLES



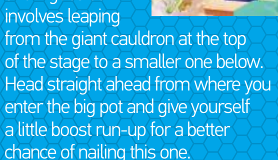
METRO KINGDOM/ SEASIDE KINGDOM SCORING ONE HUNDRED
Scoring one hundred jumps or one hundred volleyball passes in the respective games in the Metro Kingdom and Seaside Kingdom will earn you a moon in each. Suffice to say this is going to take you a long time and a lot of patience.

SAND KINGDOM EASTERN PILLAR
On the main ruins with the Bullet Bills long-jump, cap throw and dive to reach the pillars. A Bullet Bill should be right on you tail, so capture that and shake your Joy-cons to speed towards the glowing block just to the East.



CLOUD KINGDOM TAKING NOTES
Catching all the notes on this moving platform (that you need to ground pound to activate each time) can be tricky. Remember that Cappy will hit the notes on the way and on the way back so you can hit the notes in the middle moving up and down if you time it right.

MUSHROOM KINGDOM SECRET 2D TREASURE
This one's easy enough to find (it's at the bottom of a large hole inside what looks like a fountain), but beating it is another thing. In the opening, remember that dashing saves needing to leap over single gaps. Patience is needed for the rest.



LUNCHEON KINGDOM DIVING FROM THE BIG POT
This one may take a few goes as it involves leaping from the giant cauldron at the top of the stage to a smaller one below. Head straight ahead from where you enter the big pot and give yourself a little boost run-up for a better chance of nailing this one.

TAKE GREAT GAME PHOTOS

TIPS FOR TAKING THE PERFECT SCREENSHOT



1 USE DEPTH OF FIELD

This technique makes objects in the foreground stand out by blurring the background, simulating a camera being out of focus. Most photo modes let you adjust the intensity of the blur and the focal point of the shot, so experiment to your taste. Just remember that too much can look unnatural. This is effective for portraits or if you want to focus on a small detail. And if used skilfully, can make shots look photorealistic.



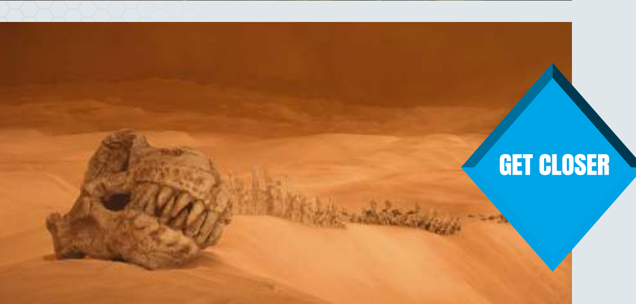
2 ADJUST THE FIELD OF VIEW

Field of view is one of the most important photo mode functions there is. If you're capturing a vista, widen the angle to get more of the scenery into the shot and make it feel more dramatic - but don't overdo it or it can look distractingly warped. You can also make your field of view narrower, which is useful for close-ups or portraits of characters. Field of view gives you fine control over your composition, so make good use of it.



3 OBEY THE RULE OF THIRDS

An essential rule of photography, painting, and illustration, which applies to taking screenshots. Mentally divide your scene up into a grid of nine rectangles, then make sure the subject of your photo is placed along the lines, or at the points where they meet. This is the key to an artful, balanced composition, and will make your screenshots a lot more pleasant to look at. This technique has been used by artists since the 1700s for a reason.



4 GET CLOSER

Game worlds are incredible these days, with endless vistas and beautiful sunsets. But while you're snapping away at those, you could be missing out on some equally impressive, smaller details around you. Take your camera closer and make subjects out of things most photographers might ignore in favour of a more dramatic shot. You'll be surprised how much granular, hand-crafted detail you can find in modern games.



5 BIDE YOUR TIME

In games with day/night cycles, the lighting around you is constantly shifting. A location might look fairly drab in the morning, but come sunset it's completely transformed. So stick around when you're shooting and capture your surroundings in different weather and lighting. The atmosphere of an image is just as important as its composition, and it's amazing how good lighting can turn an uninspiring shot into a great one.

DECIDE WHAT YOUR FIRST NEW GAME OF 2018 WILL BE

LET US HELP YOU PICK OUT THE RIGHT GAME TO GET YOUR YEAR OFF AND RUNNING

YOU SHOULD PLAY **MONSTER HUNTER: WORLD**

YOU SHOULD PLAY **A WAY OUT**

AVAST YE, MATEY, PLAY **SEA OF THIEVES**

YOU SHOULD PLAY **EA SPORTS UFC 3**

YOU SHOULD PLAY **DRAGON BALL FIGHTERZ**

IT'S MONSTROUSLY BIG

MONSTERS!? WHERE?

SHIVER ME TIMBERS, NO

HELL YEAH!

OBVIOUSLY

A MONSTER STANDS BEFORE YOU, HOW BIG IS IT?

MONSTERS? GROOVY

ODD QUESTION, BUT HOW TO YOU FEEL ABOUT MONSTERS

YOU LIKE FIGHTING GAMES?

ARE YOU A FAN OF WEIRD PHYSICS BUGS?

ER, NOT REALLY

DO YOU KNOW WHAT A 'KAMEHAMEHA' IS?

I'D PUNCH YOU RIGHT NOW

CO-OP

COMPETITIVE

BIG ENOUGH

ALRIGHT, BUT ARE YOU MORE CO-OP FOCUSED OR COMPETITIVE

NOT EXACTLY... IS IT A KIND OF FRIED SQUID?

GENERALLY SPEAKING, DO YOU PREFER CLASSIC TITLES TO BE TRAMPLED ALL OVER OR RESPECTED?

TRAMPLE AWAY

YOU SHOULD PLAY **METAL GEAR SURVIVE**

MULTIPLAYER

YOU SHOULD PLAY **DISSIDIA FINAL FANTASY NT**

GUN-SWORDS

OKAY, BIG DECISION... FIREBALLS OR GUN-SWORDS

NO. WHAT SORT OF QUESTION IS THAT?

NEVERMIND, DO YOU LIKE EATING MARSHMALLOWS ON THE BUS?

PAY SOME DAMN RESPECT

FIREBALLS

MMM, SOUNDS AMAZING

YOU SHOULD PLAY **SECRET OF MANA**

START HERE!

DO YOU FANCY SOMETHING SINGLE-PLAYER OR MULTIPLAYER?

YOU SHOULD PLAY **STREET FIGHTER V: ARCADE EDITION**

YOU SHOULD PLAY **KIRBY BATTLE ROYALE**

SINGLE-PLAYER

I'M ALL ABOUT THE STYLE

YOU SHOULD PLAY **OWLBOY**

ALRIGHT, BUT RETRO IN STYLE OR IN SPIRIT?

DEFINITELY

ARE YOU IN A RETRO MOOD?

NO, I NEED SOMETHING FRESH

SOMETHING PURE ACTION OR WITH SOME ROLE-PLAYING

GIMME ACTION!

HOW MANY BUTTONS DO YOU WANT TO USE?

AS MANY AS POSSIBLE

YOU SHOULD PLAY **BAYONETTA 1&2**

I'M RETRO IN MY HEART

YOU SHOULD PLAY **LOST SPHEAR**

I LIKE TO ROLE-PLAY WITH IT

JUST THE ONE WOULD BE BEST

YOU SHOULD PLAY **DYNASTY WARRIORS 9**

YOU SHOULD PLAY **NI NO KUNI II**

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ANIME?

YOU SHOULD PLAY **KINGDOM COME: DELIVERANCE**

LOVE IT

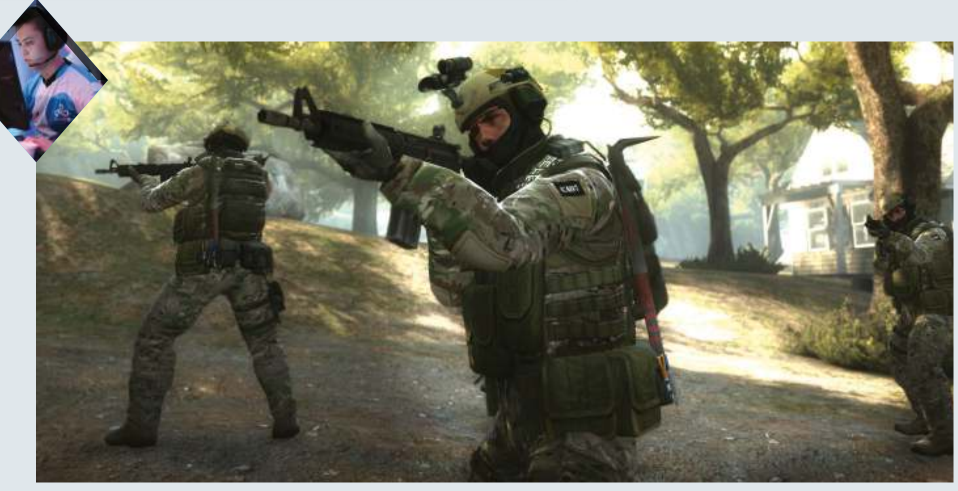
HATE IT

BECOME A PRO GAMER

THE BIGGEST NAMES IN ESPORTS, INCLUDING FORMER WORLD CHAMPIONS, OFFER UP THEIR BEST ADVICE FOR MAKING IT FROM AMATEUR TO PRO

"IF YOU'RE GOOD, YOU'RE GONNA MAKE IT EVENTUALLY"
ROPZ

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT



1 To make it to the top you need to be good, and to get to the very best levels you need to be practicing every day. But you also need to be learning. Low-quality practice is no good to anyone, make sure to play against high-quality opponents, climb the in-game ladders, and even look elsewhere, such as ESL Play or FACEIT, for competitions and online leagues.

"I was playing casually, and it felt like a drug," says Jake 'Stewie2k' Yip, a professional *CS:GO* player for Cloud9. "I was really addicted to the game, I felt genuine excitement, so I started playing more and more. I learned as I went. Every time I would get eliminated by the enemy, I would try to learn how not to get eliminated the same way. That's what you need to do, love playing and play a lot."

NETWORK

2 You can be the greatest player in the world, but if no one knows who you are, you won't make it. Be active on social media, interact with the big names, go to events and meet them, join the leagues they play in. Get your face in front of the people who could help you make the final step.

"The important thing is getting the pros, or those who are well known, to know your name, because a lot of becoming a pro is connections, getting people seeing you play," reveals Jonas 'Lekr0' Olofsson, a professional *CS:GO* player for Fnatic. "Like, if I play with a good stack in FACEIT, I start to know their names and learn about more young players, and up and coming players, and I think it's really nice."

ENJOY THE GAME



3 Nobody wants to do a job they hate, and when it comes to being a pro player your job pretty much takes over your life. You will spend thousands of hours playing your game of choice, and if you don't enjoy it then you are going to be miserable.

"Make sure that you have fun," -OpTic Gaming's Adam "friberg" Friberg tells us. "Make sure you have friends to play with, that's how I started. I had a lot of friends and we played every day and it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it. Even though we never played super serious, we still were a bit serious and competing in small tournaments, online tournaments and stuff like that. Then you can move onto bigger teams if you get noticed."

THE BIGGEST ESPORTS



Counter-Strike: Global Offensive
Long running and well established; a FPS well-tuned for pro play.



League Of Legends
The MOBA that refuses to quit; *LoL* holds ground in 2018.



DOTA 2
A MOBA with a crazy high skill-ceiling; only the best need apply.



Overwatch
Blizzard's FPS is about to hit the big time; try to go pro now!

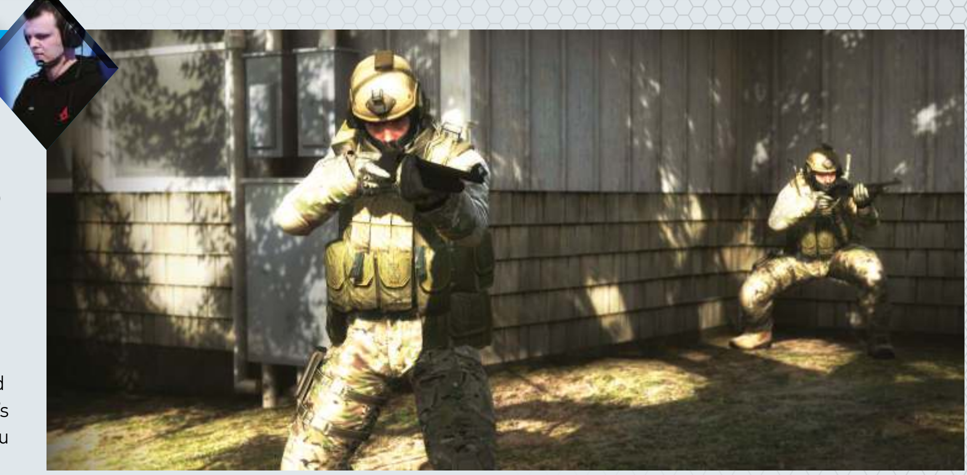


PUBG
With its huge esport aspirations, get on at the ground level.

DO THE BORING STUFF

4 Playing games is fun, but to be the very best you have to do the boring stuff as well. To improve, you need to spend hours studying the game. That might mean spending days learning how to throw a grenade to a certain position, or reading all of the ability descriptions to figure out how they interact with each other. It's boring work, but will be required to become the best.

"There is a lot of sacrifice you have to do, and a lot of tiring work as well. It's not always ideal to sit in front of the computer watching replays learning what you did wrong," reaffirms Astralis' Andreas "Xyp9x" Højsleth. "It's not something you always like, but that's something you have to do to improve."





HATERS GONNA HATE

5 Once you start to make a name for yourself in the scene, you are going to gain a few fans, and also quite a few haters. As Fnatic's Jonas "Lekr0" Olofsson tells us, even the most loved players in the world have their detractors, and they can make it feel like you are public enemy number one, but you need to ignore all that.

"One of the hardest things is probably the pressure. Most of the pros are pretty much used to it, but you still feel the pressure from the community, you know they're gonna be on your back if you play bad, or if the team plays bad. There's going to be the pressure of staying on top, but you can't be affected by that."

BE PATIENT

6 As nice as it would be, you can't just wake up one day and decide to become a pro player that week. It takes years of work and dedication, but that shouldn't come at the expense of other areas of your life that will be useful if it doesn't work out.

"You shouldn't quit doing anything that's important. For me it's important not to quit school," Robin "ropz" Kool tells us, a *CS: GO* Pro player for Mousesports "I just do what's normal in life and then, if you're good, you're gonna make it eventually. Just take every single opportunity, try to make the best out of everything, and then if it's the right time, it will come."





Photos by Joe Stephens



PICK THE RIGHT HERO IN OVERWATCH

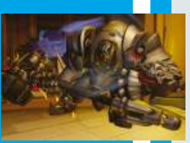
QUICK TIPS ON THE BEST WAY TO HELP YOUR TEAM

ALWAYS BE HEALING



The first question when picking your hero going into the fight should be 'does our team have a healer?' and if the answer is 'no' you need to pick one immediately. If your squad lacks pace then Ana or Mercy can be good picks. Lucio is a good secondary healer.

TANKS UP FRONT



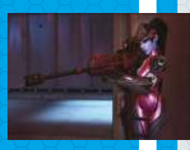
The tank and healer combo is typically essential to a well-balanced *Overwatch* team, so make sure you have one in play. For mobility Reinhardt and Roadhog are solid options, while D.Va and Winston offer a more balanced approach. Reinhardt's shield combines well with some DPS heroes.

LAY DOWN SOME DPS



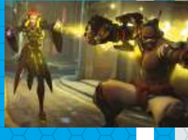
You've got a bullet sponge and a healer to keep them moving, now you need to hit them with some damage. Who you pick will depend on your comp, but Soldier: 76 is a solid pick if your FPS fundamentals are good. Tracer, Pharah, Genji and Reaper offer different flanking options.

READ THE FIELD



If you're sorted for tanks and healers then it's time to read the field of play. If you're getting flanked in an open map, then Widowmaker could help you to control the flow of the opposition. In tighter fights or if you're against well-grouped opponents someone like Hanzo can be very effective.

COUNTER THE ENEMY



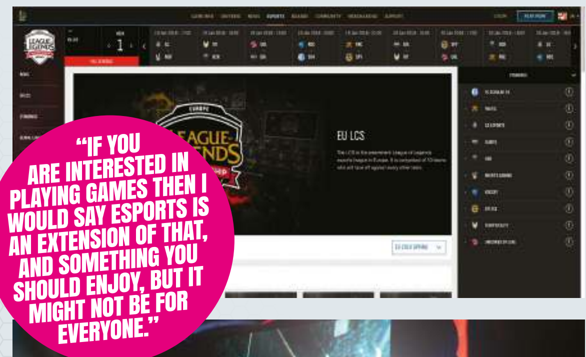
Your first job should always be to complement your team with your hero pick, but the tactical approach of the enemy can show up weaknesses in your approach. Make note of their strongest assets and find the appropriate counter to nullify them if you have to.

GET INTO WATCHING ESPORTS

COUNTER-STRIKE CASTER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT FACEIT MEDIA JAMES BARDOLPH EXPLAINS HOW TO APPRECIATE COMPETITIVE GAMING.







"IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PLAYING GAMES THEN I WOULD SAY ESPORTS IS AN EXTENSION OF THAT, AND SOMETHING YOU SHOULD ENJOY, BUT IT MIGHT NOT BE FOR EVERYONE."





LOOK AROUND UNTIL YOU FIND YOUR GAME

1 There are a ton of games out there with competitive scenes, and it's important to find one that works for you. If you already play a multiplayer game there is a high chance it has an esports community so give that a watch first and go from there. "If you have a good understanding of a game and you're able to see people perform at highest level then it can be quite exciting. If you have a good game that you know, which gives players the freedom to demonstrate their skill then that's something just like any traditional sport."

HEAD TO MORE PLACES THAN TWITCH

2 Twitch is where most broadcasts take place, and the best place to look for streams when starting out, but other options such as YouTube and MLG.tv also have top level competitions on a regular basis. "If Twitch was the only place to watch esports then they wouldn't necessarily be spurred on to advance the technology, to provide a reliable service than if they had competition. Competition drives up quality, so you'd never want one place to be the absolute home of everything."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LEARN EVERYTHING ABOUT THE GAME INSTANTLY

3 Esports is confusing and seemingly has its own language. But you don't need to worry about that just yet. Focus on what is happening in the game and ignore the stats, graphs and jargon until you feel more confident and comfortable with the on-screen action. "*League of Legends* has got mad charts on the screen. I'm not a *League of Legends* fan so I don't know what any of that means. It depends on the game, it can be simple to understand or it can be a game that requires a time investment to understand."

ATTEND A LAN EVENT

4 Attending an esports event is really the best way to experience the scene. Even with limited game knowledge you will be caught up in the atmosphere and it is sure to make you a lifelong fan. "If you're in the atmosphere the crowd will actually help you understand when you're seeing a good demonstration of skill. A live crowd will always make an experience more engaging so as long as you understand what's going on, it definitely helps to be in a live crowd over watching online at home."

HAVE FUN

5 Just because esports is popular that doesn't mean it's for everyone. Just like some people don't like rugby or golf, some will not manage to pick up any esport. Don't try and force yourself into something you don't like. "I think it helps if you play games and if you are at all competitive, you don't necessarily have to be but it helps. I think if you are interested in playing games then I would say esports is an extension of that, and something you should enjoy, but it might not be for everyone."



BECOME A COSPLAYER

WE CHAT WITH COSPLAYER **SOPHIE BOLGER** TO GET SOME TIPS

What was it that first got you into cosplay?
I'd known about cosplay since I was a teenager, but back then didn't have the confidence to get involved with it. Then back in 2013 I decided last minute to go up for the day to London MCM and the moment I saw everyone going round in these amazing costumes I new I wanted to be a part of it all.

What was your first costume?
My first costume was Poison from *Final Fight*. It was all put together the day before, as I had decided last minute that I was going to cosplay.

What's the most complex cosplay you've put together?
My most complex would definitely have to be my own spin on Fran from *Final Fantasy XII*. I had never made armour before and it was a real challenge trying to figure out how to even begin putting it together. Especially the helmet, as it had to support two heavy rabbit ears.

What would you say you need to look out for with a beginner cosplay idea?
A good way to start is to just do your research and acknowledge the skills that you have and the ones that you need to gain if you're planning to make your own. Watch YouTube tutorials, read up on cosplay blogs and most importantly plan it all out before you begin. If you don't feel confident enough, or don't have the time or money to make one yourself there is nothing wrong with buying a costume online. Cosplay is for everyone and is first and foremost for fun.

Are there things that some cosplayers tend to ignore or forget that can really make a costume pop?
The little details. It's the one thing that can make a good cosplay a great cosplay. It could be makeup, a wig or just some small details on a costume, but all those small details really do help to bring a cosplay together.

How important do you think it is to have a connection to the character you're portraying?
I personally feel it's important to have a connection to the character, but that's because it's why I cosplay. I cosplay characters that I love and want to bring to life for myself, but that's not to say it's wrong for someone to cosplay a character because they look like that character or because they've been asked to. Some people like to act out as the character, some just like to dress up, some because they just enjoy making things and others just because they love that character. I have a fellow cosplayer, Jack Strong, who I always go to events with. He also gives me a hand making my cosplays, and I make his wigs. He cosplays as Cloud Strife because he both looks like him and feels a connection with the character.

Are there any good sites or social media groups you would recommend people check out?
On Facebook there's the MCM Expo group, which is filled with almost everyone that goes to the comic con events with a big cosplay community on there. Though I would say if anyone was interested in seeing what it's all about the best way would be just to go for a day to London MCM. It's by far the best way to see first-hand what cosplay is all about. I've met so many amazing people at comic cons and it's what really helped me to get involved with it all.

COSPLAY RESOURCES

BioWare, Blizzard and Bethesda all offer character cosplay guides to help you recreate your favourite characters. You should also check out groups like **Cosplay.com**, **TheRPF.com** for prop help, **cosplaytutorial.com** and the UK Cosplay Community on Facebook for more tips and tricks.



■ Never underestimate the power of a good wig to help a costume really go up a level. The armour detailing on this FFXII Fran is also very impressive.

COUNT FRAMES IN FIGHTING GAMES

TAKE YOUR BRAWLING SKILLS UP A LEVEL BY PUSHING THE LIMITS OF EVERY ATTACK

Whenever people talk about high-skill fighting game matches, the term 'frame-counting' always comes up. It's usually used in a derogatory manner, accusing someone of 'counting frames' has become a way among more casual players of fighting games of saying 'you play/care about this game too much'. It's a silly thing to say when you really think about it. Almost all fighting games run at a locked 60 frames per second. Obviously, the human eye cannot track each individual frame of animation allowing the player to react at exactly the right moment. Frame counting is a poorly thought-out term for what is actually something common in most videogames – understanding what you can and can't get away with. Here we will teach you how you can better read the flow of a fighting game, hopefully making you a better player in the process.

FIRST ATTACK
CRUSH COUNTER

WHAT IS FRAME DATA?

1 Put simply, it is the amount of frames in any piece of animation and what the status of your character is during some of those frames. For example, every move has startup frames, active frames and recovery frames, and usually you can be hit during the startup and recovery, whilst during active frames, your punch/kick/whatever is going to hit whatever you've thrown it at. Some frames have unique properties, like invincibility. This isn't something exclusive to fighting games, but also to some other high-profile games that have built their central mechanics around them – the Souls series and Monster Hunter, being two major examples.





WHAT SHOULD I BE LOOKING FOR?

2 We're going to use *Street Fighter V* as the example, as it is a game that has some of the easiest-to-understand frame data of any of the current titles. A good thing to look for at first is moves that have a low number of startup frames. This means that the move comes out fast and reaches the 'active' stage where it will hit the opponent quickly. The other thing is to look at what the recovery frames are, especially if blocked, as this represents the window where you can punish/be punished. These two numbers make up the basics of attack and defence.

HOW DOES THAT WORK?

3 Frame data is understanding risk and reward. For example – If an opponent throws out an attack that leaves them in seven frames of recovery if you block it, and you have an attack that has under seven frames of startup, then it is impossible for them to block your riposte. If your chosen attack leads to a combo and loads of damage, then, well, maybe your opponent should think twice about throwing out a move that has that much recovery on it? This, of course, works both ways. Be careful with moves that leave you vulnerable, and be aware of moves that leave you 'safe' – moves that are hard to punish.

THIS SOUNDS LIKE HOMEWORK…

4 Okay, so it *is* homework. Most games don't teach you this stuff but the information is easy enough to find online. You're going to have to sit down with it, look for moves that cause you trouble and then see what moves your chosen character can do to beat them, if they even can. With even these absolute basics in mind, you'll be able to see whether the offense you're having trouble with is actually reckless and you can easily maximise your response, or whether you're going to have to find another way to win. Ultimately, entering a battle with a prior knowledge of some things that will categorically work is going to be advantageous.

IS THIS CHEATING?

5 Hell no! Imagine going into a football match and not knowing the offside rule and, crucially, how it can be manipulated to cause the opponent problems. It's the next logical step after you've learned what the game itself teaches you. You know what your character's normal and special attacks are and you have a few combos up your sleeve, with basic understanding of the frame data you will know *when* you can perform these whilst minimising risk. You still have to rely on your own ability and skills at the end of the day, though.

SO, IS THIS ALL THERE IS TO IT?

6 At the most basic level, yes. However, there's plenty of more complicated ways to implement this information, like finding two moves that may not combo together, but leave a gap of less than three frames between them, meaning if an opponent gets feisty and pushes a button your second attack will beat them literally to the punch (this is called a frame trap) or finding moves that have portions of their animation where they have special properties and how to best utilise them. Ultimately, the idea of knowing your basic frames is the first step towards that next level of getting good at a fighting game.



FEMI 'F-WORD' ADEBOYE

We spoke to *Street Fighter* Capcom Pro Tour and Evo commentator and analyst Femi 'F-Word' Adeboye about how learning even the basics of frame data will make you a better player and, at the very least, have a greater understanding as to how fighting games work.

"It's basic mathematics. Frame data is awesome to learn, study and apply because it tells you what options you have and just as importantly, it tells you what options your opponent has against you. Now it's all well and good going into a fight blind but ask yourself something: if this was a real fight and you can apply this kind data to your opponent's every move, would you still prefer to go in blind? I highly doubt it."

"Now, you realise that the right hook this mad man's been busting your head in with all night is extremely punishable after you block it? Get him out of here! That's frame data! You can then get deeper with frame data. Punishes and options are the very basic level. I think a beginner should start with these and grow from there."

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL ON YOUTUBE

WE SIT DOWN WITH PLAYSTATION ACCESS' **HOLLIE BENNETT** TO UNDERSTAND THE HARD WORK AND DEDICATION IT TAKES TO MAKE A SPLASH ON THE VIDEO PLATFORM

Knowledgeable and insightful; passionate and professional; calm and collected in the spotlight, Hollie Bennett is among a small group of YouTube personalities that have the qualities necessary to best represent gaming to the world at large in 2018.

While recent months may well have proven that some big names on the video platform are content with courting controversy for a like and subscribe, Bennett and her cohorts at PlayStation Access are focussed on walking the blurred line between information and entertainment. It's a difficult path to tread, but it's one that has bought independent outfit We Are Reach great success. But what is it about the former Yogscast stablemates that sets Access apart from the rest? "We are trying to inform, not just entertain; the two have to actually work together to be content that people actually want to return to," Bennett tells us, laying out the overall vision for what she strives to achieve on YouTube. "We want people to feel as if they are coming to sit on the sofa with us and joining in with the discussion about games."

Fantastic industry access, a demanding schedule of daily content, and a high-bar for quality have all helped the channel stand out, though it's undoubtedly the chemistry between the group of personable personalities – not to mention their immeasurable knowledge of the industry – that has kept audiences returning time and time again. Over 300,000 million times, in fact; impressive viewership figures line-up nicely alongside a subscriber count quickly barrelling towards 2 million, and it all adds up to showcase a channel that has so clearly resonated with a large audience skewing towards 25-34 year old gaming enthusiasts. So, how has Bennett found herself in such an enviable situation – jet setting around the world to cover videogames, interviewing the industry's biggest stars, and attending its most illustrious events? "I'm one of the lucky ones, I guess," she laughs, her humble demeanour cracked by a beaming smile recognised by millions across the globe.

While is seems like every kid with a hot take and a video camera wants to be a YouTube star nowadays, it isn't impossible to make yourself heard through the deafening noise of reaction videos, vlogs and let's plays that seemingly dominate the platform. Like so many things in life, making YouTube work for you is all about striking the right balance between attitude, confidence and perseverance. That's the way it has always been, and it's the way it is today. Bennett wasn't handed her role on Access, she – much like her colleagues Nathan Ditum, Rob Pearson, and Dave Jackson – has earned every ounce of success and adulation that has come their way.

A passion for videogames and an ambition to foster thriving communities – to drive discussion in an era defined by short attention spans – has led Bennett to where she is today; it's also a path that any one of you can follow, should you have the drive and dedication to see it through. "It's very important for anybody reading this to know that if you want to do something, like what we do on Access, you don't necessarily need to have a million subscribers to have a chance."

It's easy to forget, but YouTube only launched 12 years ago – the same year that the Xbox 360 hit the market. Twitch and Twitter didn't exist; online gaming on console was only just establishing itself, while specialist forums were seen as less of a novelty than burgeoning social platforms MySpace and Facebook. If you think it's difficult to make a name for yourself (or build a career) out of YouTube now, it's worth taking the advice of those that were there in its formative years – the mistakes have been made, the right lessons learned, and best practices implemented in response.

It was a different world then and for many who, like Bennett, grew up in "the middle of nowhere", gaining access to a world of like-minded

PlayStation Access isn't interested in reactive YouTube content, instead its presenters look to provide entertaining and informative content for its audience.





HOLLIE BENNETT'S TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

CHANNEL YOUR PERSONALITY

1 "It's not about being the first to report on news, but it's about reporting on it in your way. It's about your personality; finding your spin on the same piece of content that everybody else has got. When a game launches *everyone* can now just hit that Share button and become a content creator, so it's about doing it in your way."

TAKE YOUR TIME

2 "It's going to take time! Even if one video goes viral, that's not going to make a YouTube channel. Think about where you are in life and how much time you can dedicate to it. Who knows, maybe you'll really enjoy it – it won't be a chore, but an escape that you can one day turn into a career."

EQUIPMENT ISN'T THE BE ALL, END ALL

3 "Remember, it's personality driven content, that's the key. You don't need expensive equipment... but what I will say is this: so long as your microphone sounds good, so long as your audio sounds good, people will forgive *a lot*."

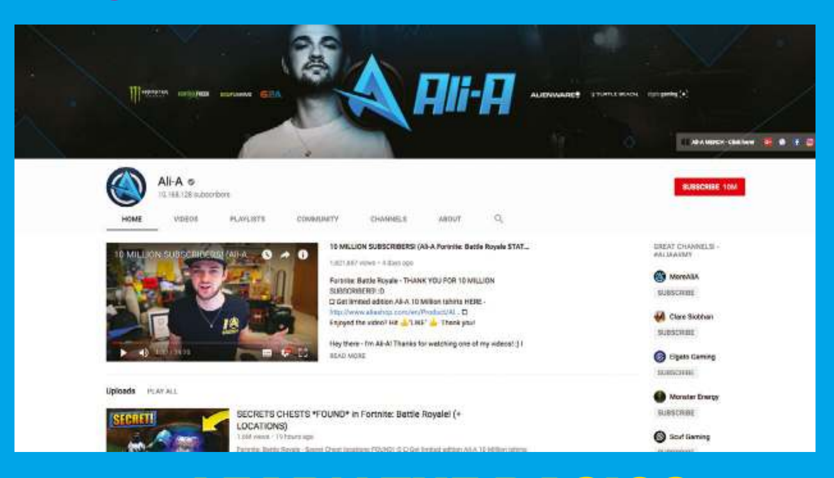
TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

4 "You do need to take it seriously though. If this is really what you want to do just take every aspect of it seriously. From the thumbnails that you make, to the way you hold yourself on camera... and remember, the things you say are out there *forever*."

BUT HAVE FUN!

5 "It's hard work, but try to have fun as well! I know we make it look glamorous, and I'm sure Twitter does a fantastic job of giving people a false impression of how fun it is, but the hours *can* be long. It just makes it all worth it, keeps you smiling even when you're tired."

"DON'T PUT TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON THE NUMBERS, BECAUSE IT CAN STILL LEAD YOU TO HAVING THIS TYPE OF CAREER"





LEARN THE BASICS

WITH 10 MILLION SUBSCRIBERS AND OVER 2.5 BILLION VIEWS, **ALI-A** IS ONE OF YOUTUBE'S BIGGEST SUPERSTARS. HERE HE OFFERS ADVICE ON HOW YOU CAN START YOUR OWN SPECIALIST CHANNEL.

What should initial expectations be when people start out?

First of all, it's definitely possible for someone to make a new channel become the next big gamer on YouTube. There's always going to be people who are coming through and growing. Just because there are big channels out there now does not mean that there's no space for anybody else. There's a bigger audience and a bigger market there ready to watch new people. You just have to be making the right content.

The key thing is making sure that if you're playing games that you enjoy and are having with it. If you're having fun and enjoying it that will hopefully traverse through your videos – the audience can tell. That's really important; being genuine. Playing games for the sake of playing games, people aren't going to be interested. I think passion and excitement and enjoyment of what you're doing is a really key part. So, play games and make videos in games that you enjoy. There are always niches out there, there are always markets out there.

How important is having unique persona in front of the camera?

Honestly, there are people who are better a fit for YouTube than others… I think being extreme, being a little bit more out there, makes you more interesting to watch. You don't know what that person is going to do next or [if] that person has a load of energy, which makes the videos more entertaining to watch. I'd always say be yourself, but then sometimes there are some people that just aren't going to fit with YouTube – if you don't bring enthusiasm, and not bringing the energy, that's a negative thing. Just try and be yourself and if you do need to overreact a little bit or emphasise yourself a little bit, that's fine, so long as it comes across in the videos as still be genuine, it definitely brings that edge of personality and entertainment to the videos that's really important.

Should people look to specialise in the games they play?

It all depends, I think. If you're a big personality and people are following your channel for your personality then the game comes second and you can play any game so long as you're making an entertaining video, people won't mind.

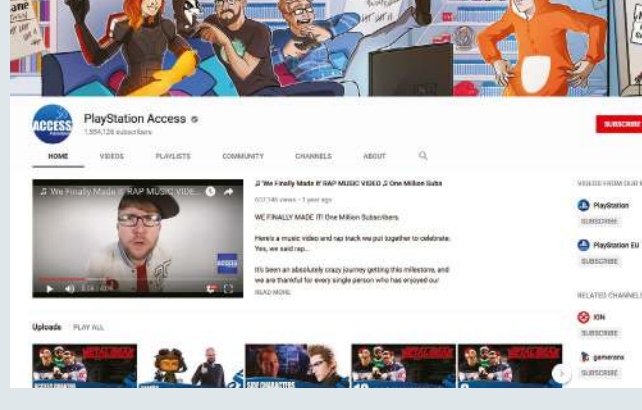
I went down the route of having the focus really being [on *Call Of Duty*], because I knew a lot about the game, and then I integrated my personality a little bit later down the line. There are those two routes again; the personality route, where the game isn't a huge issue and as long as you're having fun and making a fun video; or you have the gaming route, where you're focused on the game and your personality comes second. If you feel you're a strong personality, try a few things out, but if you're really hardcore about a game focus on that route.

How important is editing?

It honestly depends on the game. With *Minecraft* you can get away with very minimal editing, but in all honesty, the more editing and the better editing, the better your video will do. People do appreciate the little things and that's something that may not be noticeable when you first start out. A well-edited video will always bring a person back more so than a video that's been quickly put together. It's a fine balance I think, in the game community. You've got two routes you can go down. You can have lots of content, but less edited route or you can go down the less content, but highly edited route. Both have their own pluses and minuses, but if you are a good editor and you can put time into editing it's really going to pay off. It's going to make your video come across better, the video will have a better structure, be more entertaining to watch. If you don't know how to edit then find any editing software, any basic editing software and just give it a go. I couldn't edit at all when I started on YouTube, but it's something that I picked up myself over the years. It's really beneficial and will really help out your channel if you can edit well.









people for the very first time would prove to be revelatory. "I can't say I ever had any ambition to be famous YouTuber when I was growing up (because it wasn't even an option), but what I wanted to build was a community. I always wanted to build something where people who, like me, didn't have a place to belong could find somewhere," she says, noting that this attitude stemmed from her experiences leaving school and heading to university, just as YouTube started to emerge as something more than a mere companion to NewGrounds and breeding ground for the Internet's earliest memes. "I got a 'real job' on my parent's advice; I went to university and I became a midwife. But while I was training I was discovering online gaming communities; discovering people that were just like me for the first time in my life."

It's here where you get a sense of her work ethic, and begin to understand what it takes to make yourself a success in this industry. "While I was doing my training I got more and more involved with Destructoid. I started meeting people there; I saved up and I flew all the way to PAX to meet my forum friends. I started doing more and more stuff after that; I wanted to bring the UK fans of this website together – doing meets so they could also find the friends they wished they could have had growing up like me," she says, recalling the origin story that earned Bennett the title of European Community Manager for the popular gaming site.

Sticking with this role part time, producing video and podcast content for Destructoid, around her work as a midwife, eventually Bennett caught the attention of publishers. It wouldn't be long before her hard work paid off, from 2012 Bennett has held stints as a Consumer and Community PR Executive for Bandai Namco and, later, as a Social Community Manager for Sony.

But now Bennett is freelance, working exclusively with Access. Her dedication to profession is what sets her apart, a tastemaker and force of positivity familiar to millions around the world. Bennett blazed her on trail, and you'll likely find your own with the necessary dedication. Here's the thing, she suggests, it isn't – and shouldn't ever be – an impossible dream. If you too want to become a YouTube personality you can, be on your own or with another channel, but it's all about your approach.

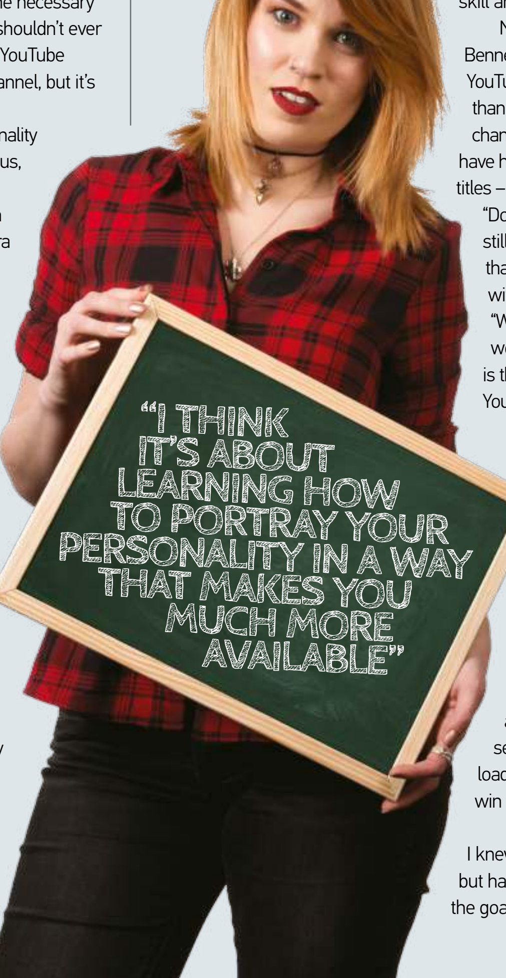
"I think it's about learning how to portray your personality in a way that makes you much more available," she tells us, noting that finding success on YouTube in a professional capacity isn't necessarily about trying to mimic the way in which television presenters handle themselves on camera but on ensuring that you are able to open yourself up to a viewer in a way that feels genuine. "YouTube, Twitch; its personality driven content. The industry has tried to put YouTubers and Twitch streamers on a more television-style setting and it wasn't quite right for their personalities," she continues, giving **games™** horror flashbacks to EA's 2017 E3 presentation. "It doesn't draw them out in the best possible way."

There's no one surefire way of gaining the confidence to feel at ease in front of a camera and properly project your personality, though Bennett does have one tip on that front: "I talk to myself all the time! I know it sounds really daft, but I like to think: 'If somebody was to ask me a question, how would I answer it?' In the shower especially; I'm forever almost interviewing myself, because it's how I would then portray what I want to say to others."

A little chatter never hurt anybody, but ultimately the only way you are likely to get any better – to see any noticeable improvement in both your demeanour and the quality of your content – is to actually start doing it. You've likely heard this one plenty of times in the past but it still rings true to this day: practice makes perfect. "The thing you need to do is just start making and uploading. Even if one day you delete them all



■ Access is now independently run following its departure from the Yogscast Network in 2017, a move that allows it to be more agile in the space.



because 'oh my god, they are all just so embarrassing! I can't believe I ever sounded like that' but it is important that you get practicing. The more you do this the better you get," Bennett tells us, although she is quick to note that it's this period in which so many potential YouTube hopefuls give up. "What is difficult about that is that you could work on something all weekend, and you could be so proud, but when you see it get like 15 views it can be easy to think 'well, why did I bother?' But its not necessarily about the views, it's about perfecting your skill and building a portfolio."

Now that's not something you hear every time – but then Bennett is no ordinary YouTube personality. But it's true; your YouTube channel can, essentially, act as a C.V. There are more paths than ever into the game. Even if you struggle to crack the specialist channel market – something the likes of Arekkz Gaming and Ali-A have had on lock for a number of years with the industry's biggest titles – it could still lead to you getting a fantastic job in the industry. "Don't put too much pressure on the numbers, because it can still lead you to having this type of career," Bennett tells us, noting that YouTube today is essentially about demonstrating your skills, with your channel essentially acting as a slideshow of your style. "What people need to [remember] is that your channel almost works like a portfolio… if community and social management is the way that you want to go, for example, being able to run a YouTube channel is now a skill that [companies] request of you."

"A lot of YouTubers don't even realise that it's not even maybe about this one channel becoming famous but it's a C.V. worthy skill that can maybe get you to work for a company where you can be part of something, like Access. Xbox On is another great example; Yogscast too; it's about practice. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day."

With Access and her own Twitch channel, Bennett looks at both endeavours as forces of positive change and impact in the industry. Perhaps offering the best tip that she can – don't look at YouTube as a potential career first, but as a starting point for discussion and engagement. "I'm happy to see [one of our] videos not even get that many views if its got loads of comments and great discussion underneath it. That's a win for me, because it means we've created something engaging."

"This is when I know we are on the right track, because then I knew we are building something that was not only memorable but having a positive impact on the audience. To me, that's the goal; building communities."

MAKE A GAME (WITH ZERO EXPERIENCE)

EVEN IF YOU'VE NEVER CODED IN YOUR LIFE YOU CAN START CREATING SOMETHING

RPG MAKER MV (£60.99)

RPG Maker has a long, storied and complex history dating back around 20 years at this point, but the latest version is the most powerful out there and still offers plenty of potential for the newbie developer. Those with more experience might find some of its tools and settings limiting, but if you want to create something with solid RPG foundations, it's a really good place to start. Character generation takes some of the pressure off you art-wise, while the battle system mechanics are already there for you to use. And if that doesn't take your fancy, the earlier, simpler and cheaper versions of RPG Maker are still available as is Visual Novel Maker and IG Maker for platformers and shooters.

EXAMPLES

STARLESS UMBRA
ONE NIGHT 3



TWINE (£FREE)

This one doesn't have the thrills and spills of some other development tools, but for learning the power of hypertext and the basics of good interactive story structure, Twine is a fantastic place to make your start and can let you make some fantastic stories. As the many, many examples of Twine games on **Itch.io** will prove to you, there's a lot of potential in these simple tools to build something really engaging. You may need to bring some of your own artistic skills to give your story some visual flair, but for just constructing a tale that people can explore and immerse themselves in, Twine is a fantastic tool.

EXAMPLES

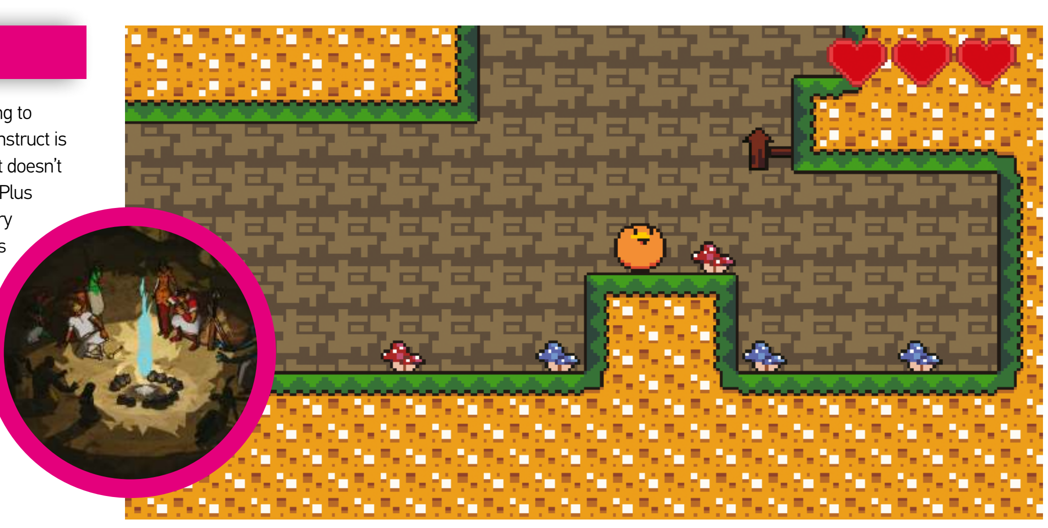
DEPRESSION QUEST
THE UNCLE WHO WORKS FOR NINTENDO

CONSTRUCT 3 (£79)

For game building on the move without needing to worry about what device you have to hand, Construct is a browser-based option for getting started that doesn't need any programming language knowledge. Plus the games you make with the software are very versatile. In fact you can see and play the spoils of the program on the Scirra Arcade where there are many platformers, puzzlers, adventures, shooters and more for you to take a look at. It's a great place to get some inspiration or see just how far your skills could go if you just invest a little time to learn how to use Construct 3 properly.

EXAMPLES

PIXEL BEAR ADVENTURE
EURGAVA





CLICKTEAM FUSION 2.5 (£59.99)

Now we're stepping into the more advanced and versatile tools available to the fledgling game-developer, as Fusion can claim such releases as *The Escapists*, *Not A Hero* and *Five Nights At Freddy's* among its alum. An in-built physics engine means you can immediately start adding a lot of production value to your creation once you have the basics of art assets and backgrounds dragged into place. Additional export tools can be purchased too, so that the titles you make can be launched on iOS and Android as well as the system's native Windows app support. If you can bring a little extra knowledge to this tool you can do great things.

EXAMPLES
FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S
THE ESCAPISTS



GAMEMAKER STUDIO 2 ($39-$399)

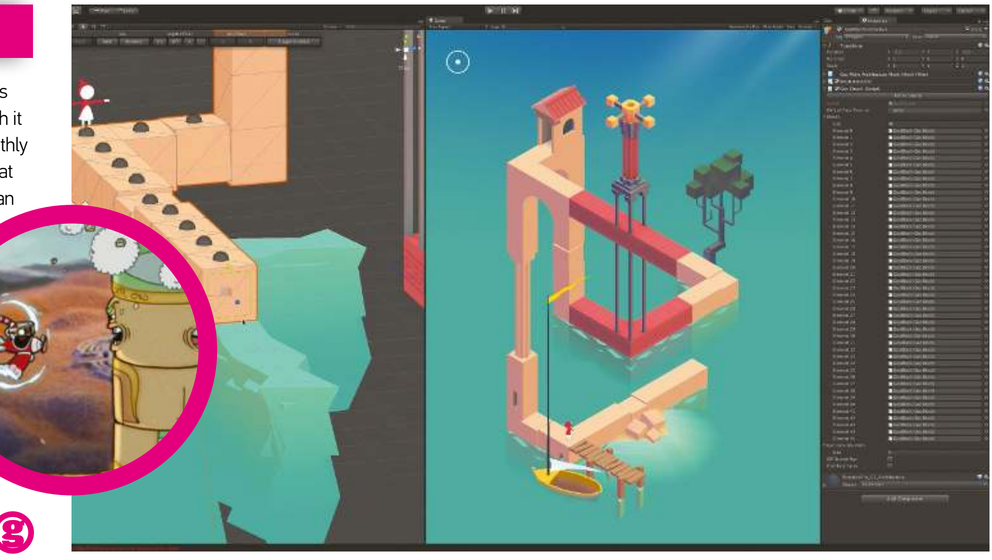
This is a pretty amazing, scalable tool for game-making. It's a little more involved than some other tools out there, using some basic logic formats for a lot of its key mechanics building, but it means you can really get more and more from the software as you progress with it. Actually using Game Maker is really easy though with drag and drop systems for most of the features you would want to use. The Room Editor gives you great visualisation of live game creation and the Image Editor will let you create assets really quickly and easily from scratch. It's also helped to make some great indie releases in recent years.

EXAMPLES
HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER
VA-11 HALL-A

UNITY 2017.3 (£FREE)

One of the many amazing things about Unity is that it's completely free to get started with. If you advance with it and fancy releasing then you can subscribe for a monthly fee to get your game out into the world. But before that you can actually take advantage of everything Unity can do. You can also start one of Unity's own courses for $12 a month that will walk you through the engine and give you all the knowledge you need to make something incredible. Unity may power some amazing games like *Monument Valley* and *Cuphead*, but it's one of the most popular indie game engines around for a reason; it's a powerful and accessible piece of kit that scales really well to different platforms.

EXAMPLES
FIREWATCH
ORI AND THE BLIND FOREST





HOW TO PUBLISH YOUR GAME

PHIL ELLIOT, DIRECTOR OF INDIE PUBLISHING AT SQUARE ENIX WEST, DETAILS WHAT IT TAKES TO GET YOUR GAME NOTICED BY A PUBLISHER

Why is it important to look for a publisher or seek publisher support?

It's important to start out by saying it's not impossible to succeed without a publisher. If you have a game that already has people talking, and there's a good awareness of it, you have a great head start. The reason for working with a publisher (or similar) normally boils down to one or both of two things: investment and marketing.

One thing that's important to remember is that success is never guaranteed, even with a big publisher on board. The benefit of working with partners is to optimise an opportunity – but a lot can change in the games industry in 12 months (see 2017 as an example…) and it's normally at least that amount of time between signing a game and releasing it.

Is self publishing viable in this market?

To be frank, it's probably only viable for a small number of teams at this point. There are indies who already have a great following and reputation, and in fact some of these – who were probably releasing games six or seven years ago when there were far fewer releases – are becoming mini-publishers themselves.

The thing that really matters (other than the game being interesting/good, of course!) is that people find out about it, and have enough information to make a decision to buy it. There are numerous ways to get attention for games today – press, streamers, content creators – but if you're a small, lesser known team with an original IP, then make sure you have somebody working on building that awareness from day one. Go to events, meet press, build relationships, and get your work out there. The more you do at the start, the better position you'll likely be in when it matters the most.

That said, there will always be those games that capture people's attention and probably succeed more alone than they would if they were signed to a publisher. Very rarely do these come from nowhere to be an overnight sensation though – so if you do self-publish, it's wise to plan what you'll do in the event the game fails. And even if that happens, if user reviews are good, keep pushing as much as you're able, because sometimes all it takes is one influential person to pick it up and rave about it.

What advice would you give for creators looking to write their first pitch to a publisher?

This might be different for different people, but speaking personally I want as much clarity on what the game is going to be as possible. The more you can demonstrate what the finished article will be like, the surer I can be that we're on the same wavelength.

> **"YOU'LL ONLY GET ONE CHANCE TO IMPRESS - SO DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO MAKE IT AS STRONG AS IT CAN BE"**
> PHIL ELLIOT

Try to have as much visual material as possible, and if you can show capability by having a vertical slice or game demo, that's great. The most impactful pitches might only feature a very small piece of gameplay, but if that piece is at finished quality and really polished, it shows me what you're capable of and what you're expecting to create.

Many teams won't be at that point when it comes to pitching, but in many cases you'll only get one chance to impress – so do everything you can to make it as strong as it can be.

What do you look for in a game at Square Enix Collective?

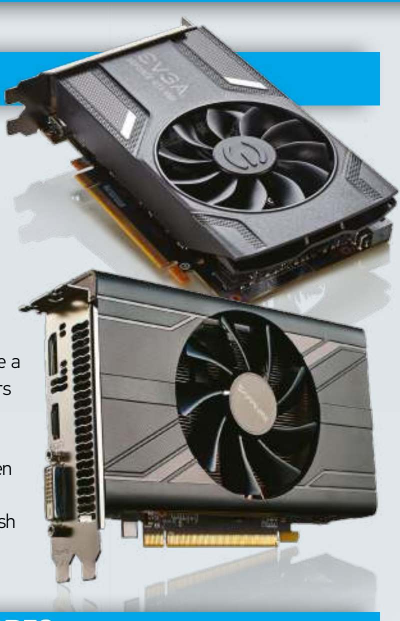
This is something that's changed a bit in the last few years, as we're affected by the number of releases, just like everything else. The good news for gamers is that the standards of games has steadily increased – though this just pushes the bar higher for developers coming in.

So we're looking for something that will stand out – maybe that's in terms of originality, or perspective, or subject. But we don't have a specific list of genres or settings we look for; we try to judge every game on its own merits.

BUILD A BUDGET GAMING PC

SOME ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR RIG UP AND RUNNING WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

GO BIG ON GRAPHICS



It's mostly common knowledge but it bears repeating: the single most important component of a PC when it comes to gaming is the graphics card. Expect to spend around a third of your budget on the fastest you can get.

That said, if you're only using a 1080p, 60Hz monitor then spending much more than £200 on a card will be a waste – the Nvidia GTX 1060 3GB offers the best bang for your buck for 1080p gaming right now.

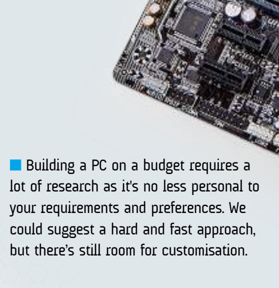
If your budget can stretch further then there are plenty of other ways to spend it, not least of which is buying a higher refresh rate or higher-resolution monitor.

CLOCK SPEED OVER CORES



One of the most exciting developments in PC gaming this year was the arrival of AMD's Ryzen CPUs. By bringing the fight to Intel the entire CPU market is now better value than ever, with quad-core, six-core and even eight-core processors being relatively affordable.

However, when it comes to gaming, clock speed is still king. So even though you may be able to afford an eight-core processor, you'll be better off with a faster-clocked quad or six-core. Either the Intel Core i3-8350K or AMD Ryzen 1500X are ideal as they have reasonably high clock speeds and are easy to overclock.



■ Building a PC on a budget requires a lot of research as it's no less personal to your requirements and preferences. We could suggest a hard and fast approach, but there's still room for customisation.

PICKING YOUR MOTHERBOARD



First and foremost you need to make sure that you're picking a motherboard that's compatible with your chosen processor. We've suggested the Intel Core i3 and the AMD Ryzen as potential options, but each of those requires a different motherboard to work.

What you don't need to worry about on a budget is all of the extras. You can bypass add-ons like multiple graphics cards, extra USB slots, lots of additional SATA ports for extra hard drives. All of these are great if you can afford them, but if you want to save money they really shouldn't be the priority for where your money is going. We can spend it better elsewhere.

POWER IT UP



You're looking for at least a 500 Watt power supply to get you moving with your budget rig, but there might be an easier way even on a budget. Some cases come with integrated power supplies, which may cost a little extra, but could work out good value overall and save you some space wherever you decide to set up your finished machine. It's certainly something to keep in mind.



SAVE ON STYLE



We'd all love a PC that doesn't just perform but looks good doing it too. However, style doesn't come cheap and instead building a budget PC is all about maximising your bang for buck.

As such, spending extra on premium build materials like brushed aluminium and glass or on fancy RGB fans is not the way to go. You can buy a perfectly ample case for under £30.

For instance, the Aerocool Aero-300 is a good-quality case with a modern layout and excellent cooling. Hide it under your desk, and no-one will be the wiser that it's a bit of an ugly duckling.

DON'T WASTE WATER



It should go without saying that a custom water-cooling loop for a budget PC is not on the cards. However, you may be tempted to go for one of those popular all-in-one liquid coolers.

They're very effective and they free up a lot of space around the middle of your motherboard, making it look tidier and easier to access other components.

However, they don't come cheap, and in terms of cooling performance, bog-standard air coolers are the budget way to go. The Raijintek Themis offers excellent cooling and whisper-quiet operation for just £25.

A SOLID FOUNDATION



One way you can save money with a budget PC build is to forgo an SSD. If you really are trying to squeeze every last drop of performance out of a tight budget then you may be better off spending an extra £50-£100 on your graphics card or CPU, rather than buying a small SSD that won't even have enough room for more than a couple of games.

It'll mean your games take longer to load, but once loaded performance should hardly be affected. That said, if you already have older hard drives you can use for bulk storage, then spending £50 on a 120GB SSD will be worth it for the quick Windows boot times alone.

PREPARING FOR MEMORY



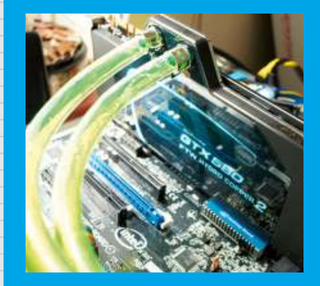
We're going to say for the sake of argument that you should start with about 8GB of RAM to get you going and typically you would be looking to grab two 4GB sticks to cover that. With an additional two slots available, that leaves you some room to upgrade to 16GB in the coming years. However, if you really want to future-proof yourself then consider getting a single 8GB stick for your RAM, allowing for three further expansions of the same size for a final 32GBs of memory, should your gaming library demand and your financial circumstances allow in the years to come.

GET TOOLED UP

Despite how sophisticated and complicated they are internally, putting together a PC is actually very simple. Just one tool is needed – a screwdriver – but it's worth getting a few key basics to make the whole build process easier.

For a start, forget about interchangeable ratchet driving, multi-tool screwdrivers. Go out and get a nice long Philips head model with a PH2 size tip, such as the Stanley PH2-250. It'll fit nearly all the screws in a PC build and a reach all those awkward spots.

Also grab yourself a set of long-nosed pliers for picking up dropped screws, a magnetic parts tray and a nice compact flashlight. Now you're all set to get building.



THE RISK AND REWARD OF CPU & GPU OVERCLOCKING

A common approach to getting more out of your PC on a budget is to overclock its core components for improved performance. That can also mean increased voltage and heat as a result and can lead to components being burnt out faster than normal, so it comes with some disadvantages over time. However, smart implementation can really make a difference to how fast games are processed and how well your PC handles all the information.

To make sure your CPU can handle what you're about to throw at it you'll need to do some benchmarking before finally selecting your overclocking speed in your BIOS. Test the CPU at idle and max load with some software like Prime95 (which is free). You'll also need something like Core Temp to measure temperatures. How a chip performs depends entirely on its manufacturing process and can be very unpredictable, so tests like these will set you on the right course.

GPUs also carry their risks and benefits when overclocked and the rewards can be limited, so we encourage great caution with this avenue of performance boosting as the cost may be far greater than the reward. It's also not always as simple as increasing voltage anymore, with Nvidia GPU Boost and AMD Power Tune no longer allowing that approach. Forcing it might actually cause the GPU to get rather confused about temperatures as they struggle against industry-set power limits. Manufacturers often offer software to customise performance, however, so leaning on this should make sure that you are avoiding any major pitfalls. Check out TechRadar for more software tips and guides.

MAKE YOUR START IN GAME MAKING

AT THE BFX FESTIVAL **GAMES™** HAD THE PLEASURE OF HOSTING A GAMING PANEL FOR STUDENTS ABOUT DEMYSTIFYING THE GAMES INDUSTRY. HERE ARE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR CONVERSATION

JODIE AZHAR



LEAD TECHNICAL ARTIST, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

With a love of maths, science and art, Azhar looked to combine her interests in animation as a technical artist, building the tools that make creative ideas possible.

MATTHEW DICKINSON



HEAD OF TECHNICAL ART & RENDERING, FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS

Starting his career as an environment artist where he discovered his passion for fixing problems more than creating content, Dickinson was led to a technical position.

VICKI WONG



LEAD ARTIST, SPACE APE GAMES

Starting with an interest in 2D graphics and then adding modded content to *The Sims*, Wong moved into 3D graphics, AR and now mobile gaming with Space Ape Games.

ADRIAN SMITH



DIRECTOR, AMUZO

Smith has 30 years of industry experience having founded Core Design with his brother. After success at Core (and the legendary *Tomb Raider*) Smith continues to build new and creative development teams.

SOFRONIS EFSTATHIOU



PRINCIPAL LECTURER, NCCA BOURNEMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Starting his education in industrial design, his love of games sent Efstathiou towards animation, training other artists in computer animation (including at Lionhead) and now a lecturer at Bournemouth University.

What are some things that you wish people knew about getting into the games industry that they don't seem to understand?

Dickinson: People get focused and think they need to be a programmer, need to be an artist, need to be an animator, need to be a designer. Actually, there's a lot more depths and niches in there. In some ways you can never be too focused. It's good to pick something, delve into it, show you understand it, even if in the end that's not what you're directly applying for. It shows you're self-driven, you're motivated and you learn things off your own back. That's something we really look for when we hire people.

Azhar: I'd build on that and say people don't realise how specialised things get. Everyone knows that programmers make videogames but there are AI programmers, gameplay programmers, graphics programmers, tool programmers. Depending on what game you are making, you can really specialise. You see that in every discipline. You have level designers, narrative designers and technical designers. You can focus really closely on something and it ranges from more design or more artistic to the more technical end.

> "IF I CAN SEE IN A PORTFOLIO THAT SOMEONE REALLY ENJOYS WHAT THEY DO THEY'LL DO A BETTER JOB"
> JODIE AZHAR

Smith: Are you up for a triple-A company, a large development studio, or are you up for a smaller development studio? Picking up on that point, there are considerable differences between the two. It really goes in line with where you are on your journey and what motivates and excites you.

Wong: I have some very practical tips to give. Never go to an interview if you haven't played that studio's game. That's the ultimate tip for me. Definitely do your homework – CVs and portfolios are great, but if you are applying for a job in the games industry, you personally should actually play games and not just go: 'Yeah, I play *Call Of Duty*, I play *Overwatch*'. You need to understand the depth – what makes them fun and do some homework about it. I watch some talks from GDC, stuff like that.

Efstathiou: For me, having been in education for 17 years, I think sometimes that students and graduates as they're working towards their project, they think it's about quantity and not quality, so they do a four- or five-minute film or a massive game environment, but what they're not doing is picking up on the projects and the areas that are really important. Most of the times I have spoken to recruiters, they want to see quality – small stuff that works really well that shows the skills off.

Any other tips for getting your foot in the door with a studio?

Efstathiou: The first one is don't copy and paste your CV and put the wrong studio's name on there. That happens a lot. You'd be surprised.

Dickinson: Don't send an email with every other studio you have applied to on.

Smith: Work on the assumption that you are hugely talented – you just need to prove it to us.

Do you have any examples of CVs or portfolios that have really stood out to you in their presentation?

Wong: I have an example for a graphic designer – his CV is very modern, very beautifully designed and he turned his skills into skill-points, laid out all funky, there were pie charts. I don't know what it was. It looked like some kind of modern graphics report in a CV.



■ Adrian Smith's Amuzo specialises in what it terms brand games, and has a particularly strong focus on family-friendly mobile and flash titles, such as this LEGO Star Wars title, *Ace Assault*.



■ *LEGO Hero Factory: Breakout* is another example of Azumo's web-based games. It has also worked with BBC Radio 1, PlayMobil and many other famous brands in recent years.



Technical artist Jodie Azhar gave a presentation at BFX in October 2017 about how *Total War: Warhammer 2* uses optimisation of its art assets to make sure the game runs as smoothly as possible from every camera perspective.

Dickinson: On the flipside, the ones that don't stand out to me, especially from graduates, are the ones where as nice as your coursework is, it's all your coursework in the order that you did it. If you are on the same course, and graduate at the same time, you will have 30-odd examples of the same piece of work. Other universities will be the same and we can almost see which course you were on by looking at your portfolio because we are so used to seeing things in the same order.

Azhar: I want to work with people who really love what they do and really care about what they do. If I can see in a portfolio that someone really enjoys what they do they'll do a better job. So, I think you can't always tailor all the work in your portfolio to the studio that you are applying to but you need to be aware of what kind of games they make. There's no point in having stylised 3D models if you are applying to a studio that only makes realistic games. You need to be able to show that you can do that job. But yeah, showing that you care, and especially if you can tailor your work to that studio, it shows that you are interested in it.

If you're looking for work in the industry or still studying, what can you be doing to make yourself stand out from the crowd?

Dickinson: Basically, the thing is it can be hard, you can do all the research you want and you are still not where you want to be, but don't give up. It's a creative industry. You'll have days in your job where you'll hate it, you won't like the cycle of the project you are working on. The good people, it's the passion, as we've talked about, that keeps them in the role. That's what we're trying to identify in an interview. You need to show that. You need to constantly improve yourself. There's nothing wrong with getting to your third or fourth or fifth interview and asking for feedback. I asked for feedback every interview I was at.

Azhar: There are even other routes of getting in. We have hired people who have really liked our games and started modding because of their passion for what we do. We have seen that. They have wanted to make games. But we have people who have come up from QA, they have studied a relevant subject and come in to get experience in QA to understand the process of games.

Smith: There are independents, relatively small teams with a burning desire and passion to produce a game. There are lots of government-funded systems in place, there lots of organisations that you can talk to. There are lots of angels and VC companies that will back great ideas. If it's a route you want to go down, it is difficult. We're not saying it's easy, we've been in the industry a long time. Thirty years ago, when I started in the industry, it was very different to how it is now. Practically everyone at Core was someone who was self-taught at home because there was no other way to learn.







The role of technical artist is essentially one of problem solving and bridging the gap between art and technology. In a game as expansive as *Elite: Dangerous* someone like Matt Dickinson at Frontier Development has their work cut out.



Could you tell us a little about the role of Ukie and what funding opportunities might be out there for someone wanting to make their start now?

Azhar: Ukie, the UK games interactive entertainment body, often talk to the government about what the games industry needs in terms of supporting the creative sector. They talk about funding opportunities and they support members. As a game developer, you can join Ukie and you can get legal advice or support, so they offer a lot to game developers. They also have Ukie Students, which you can sign up for. There is a small charge, but they have a conference, Ukie Conference North and South. Ukie South Conference was done for, I think, the first time this year in London. That gives you an opportunity to go listen to people giving talks. They also do a game jam. They also do things like sponsorship to send people to Gamescom.

Smith: There are lots of funds – Creative England, Funding Circle; with these people it's a relatively easy process to go through. It's mainly government money and comes with minimum risk to you personally. £40-£60,000 is quite often very achievable based off of concept. Every quarter you can put a concept, an idea, a prototype forward, and it comes from the old film industry funding. All they are looking for is a return when the product is out and is successful when it's on shelves.

Dickinson: One thing to do is not to be afraid of saying: 'Look, I want to go get a job for a year or two in the industry, get some experience, see how games are made and then leave and do my own thing.' If you have a burning idea in the back of your head, hold on to that and use your experience from the industry to drive that forward. A recent example from Frontier: we had a couple of guys leave to go do *Overcooked*, which obviously did very well, it was BAFTA-nominated, they went to Team17 and worked with them. It's worked out very well for them.

> "IF YOU HAVE A BURNING IDEA IN THE BACK OF YOUR HEAD, HOLD ON TO THAT AND USE YOUR EXPERIENCE FROM THE INDUSTRY TO DRIVE THAT FORWARD"
> MATTHEW DICKINSON

On the subject of funding, what do you know and what are your thoughts on crowdfunding as a means of getting a gaming project going?

Wong: It's a great way to see if you actually have a market. You're not losing anything, you are just putting out a concept and if people back you, these are going to be our players.

Azhar: It's important to understand the pros and cons of it, and you can say the same for working in a studio – there you are working on someone else's game, but you get a salary every month so that's very stable. Crowdfunding is probably the riskiest funding method as an indie developer, and a lot of that relies on you being able to market yourself. If nobody knows your Kickstarter page is there, nobody is going to go to it.

It might be worth thinking about publishing options, talking to a publisher. It doesn't necessarily have to be a relationship where they are involved in the development process. Some publishers are interested in getting

The world of game development is a multifaceted one that requires experts and specialists in all sorts of areas, which is something Jamie Wood of Playground Games discussed at BFX with regards to his role as lead lighting artist on *Forza Horizon 3*.







■ Space Ape Games has developed a specialisation in mobile strategy titles such as *Samurai Siege* and *Rival Kingdoms*, offering some really detailed and tactically rich scenarios for you to test yourself against when you're on the move.

■ Space Ape has also transferred some of its skills in base attack mechanics and strategy gameplay to the Transformers licence with *Transformers: Earth Wars* on iOS and Android. It's packed full of nods to the original animated show.

interesting indie titles and it might be that actually you want more support on the marketing side rather than someone to be there giving input.

What advice can you give a small team of new developers about working smartly and efficiently to achieve their goal?

Wong: The first thing you can do is put a game in a person's hand and see their feedback. That's the best thing. Keep checking on it. Definitely have the game with these features end of this month, then plan your next features. That's how we do it at the studio. Just plan out.

Dickinson: Being realistic about all your contingency times with things. People have holidays, they don't work every day and fancy stuff. Problems happen – it's really easy to look at something and say: 'That will take two days' and it ends up being five, and you ask where the extra three days go? People aren't great at estimating things. You should look at how your estimation process works, feed it back, look at what one piece of work has taken versus the estimate, feed that back.

Smith: Just keep iterating.

Wong: And don't feel bad about throwing things out.

Azhar: I can't remember who said it, but they said: 'Game design isn't finished when I can stop adding things; it's when I can stop taking things away.' Especially if it's your first game, you need to be keeping it small and contained so you can finish it. You need to know what your minimum viable product is – what is the game in its simplest state that you can release it?

Wong: You're absolutely right. Say you're making *Mario Kart*, make sure you have the racing feeling good first before you start thinking about making a princess and making ten different karts.

What about if you don't have any coding or programming skills? Do you have a place in your studios for history or English graduates?

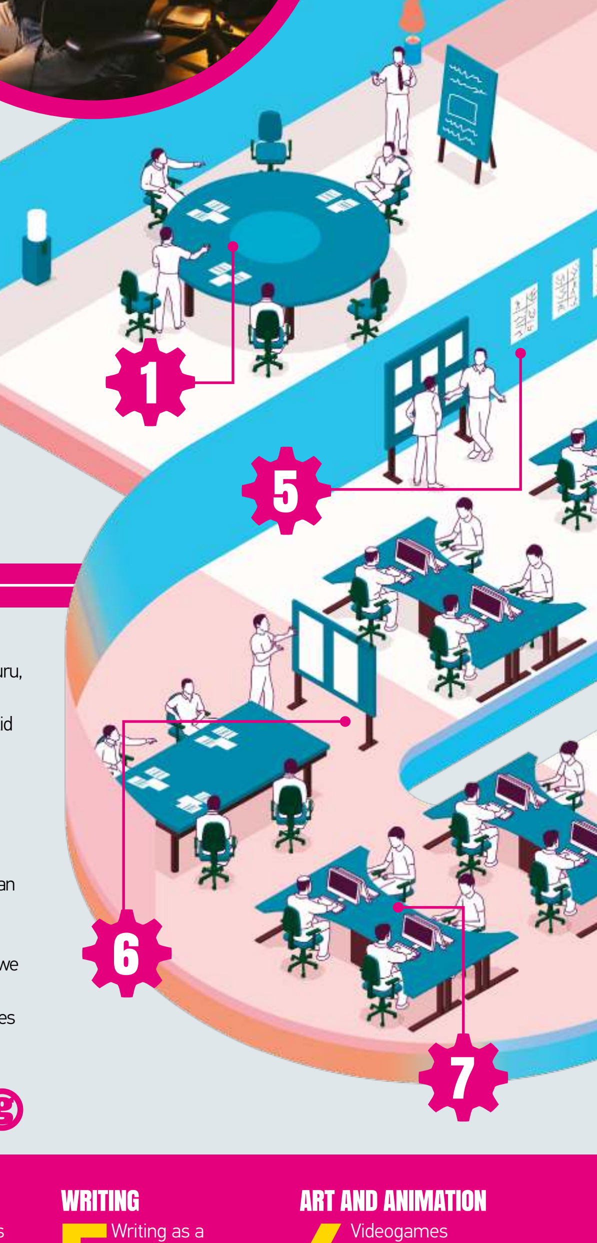
Smith: We do, I'm sure the rest of the panel does. There's lots of research into it at the moment, lots of titles are more successful playing off exactly the elements you spoke about.

Azhar: It really depends on what you are applying for. We have people with history and English degrees in design roles, and specifically for our historical *Total War* that's really useful to have someone who has actual knowledge of how certain battleships work. If you want to keep on that psychology angle, that's definitely an area that we as an industry… we're really good at making games but often we leave it later to go: 'Do players enjoy it? And why?' You could even get a position as a consultant if you can market yourself and get out there to be a consultant on games.

Dickinson: We have hired people with astronomy backgrounds for *Elite Dangerous*. There are no end to the list of people that you need if you're a big studio. It's not just about programmers and artists and designers, you've got marketing, you've got publishing, you've got HR. It's not all just people who make the game, there's a load of support staff that we talk about very rarely that do that. It's a big field, it's a massive, massive industry, it's the fastest growing entertainment sector that there is.

Want to watch the whole panel? Head to this link: bit.ly/BFXgamesTM • For more info on the BFX Festival go to www.bfxfestival.com

HOW TO BREAK INTO THE GAMES INDUSTRY



THERE ARE SO MANY MOVING PARTS TO MAKING A VIDEOGAME AND THERE COULD BE A PLACE FOR YOU

Tell us if this story sounds familiar: you're playing a videogame and have found yourself pushing up against a handful of its design decisions, or had your sense of immersion shattered by some negligible frustration, and in response you've made the bold claim that you could have done it better yourself – presenting a list of fixes and changes you'd implement should you have the opportunity to some Internet forum. Well, here's the thing; that kind of social media dissent doesn't fly anymore. Every one of you can become a cog in the game creation machine now.

The games industry is bigger than it has ever been, meaning there are more opportunities than ever before to make your mark and impart your creative vision – in what ever form it should choose to manifest itself – to the world. The size, structure, and variety of roles available in the industry *has* shifted dramatically over the last decade, and so **games™** wanted to take this opportunity to spotlight some of the most important, most exciting, and most unconventional roles in it. You don't need to be a coding guru, a master artist, or expert animator to make your start in the industry anymore – although they are certainly still valid options – as there's a now a wide variety of opportunities available for any and all should you truly want to work around games as your full time profession.

25 industry professionals sat down with **games™** to discuss their specialities, to detail what their roles involve on a day-to-day basis, and to offer advice as to how you can follow in their footsteps. You'll see some familiar names and faces in here – folk that we've covered extensively throughout the 15 years of the magazine's shelf life – but we also believe it is important to cover some unfamiliar ones too; alongside these brilliant women and men of the games industry, you too can join them and make up the next generation of game creators. It's going to take dedication, perseverance, and time, but there's nothing stopping you from breaking into the games industry too.

PRE-PRODUCTION

1 Before full-scale production can begin, the senior development team must produce a game design document and work on initial concept development. This will highlight the game's concept, major themes, and lay out its mechanics and systems. This is designed to drive development forward, an ever evolving reference guide to keep each of the teams on track.

STUDIO MANAGEMENT

2 Behind every great videogame, and behind every great studio, is a studio head and team of producers managing the vision of the internal personnel and projects. Responsible for updating publishers throughout production and, more importantly, on ensuring that projects stay on track, under-budget, and in keeping with various development milestones.

GAME DESIGN

3 An essential part of any team and project, the design team is responsible for driving the execution of the design document. From the content itself to the rules that govern the game's world and characters, game design is a collaborative process in which artistic and technical proficiencies are necessary alongside creative flair and the ability to adapt to changing conditions.

PROGRAMMING

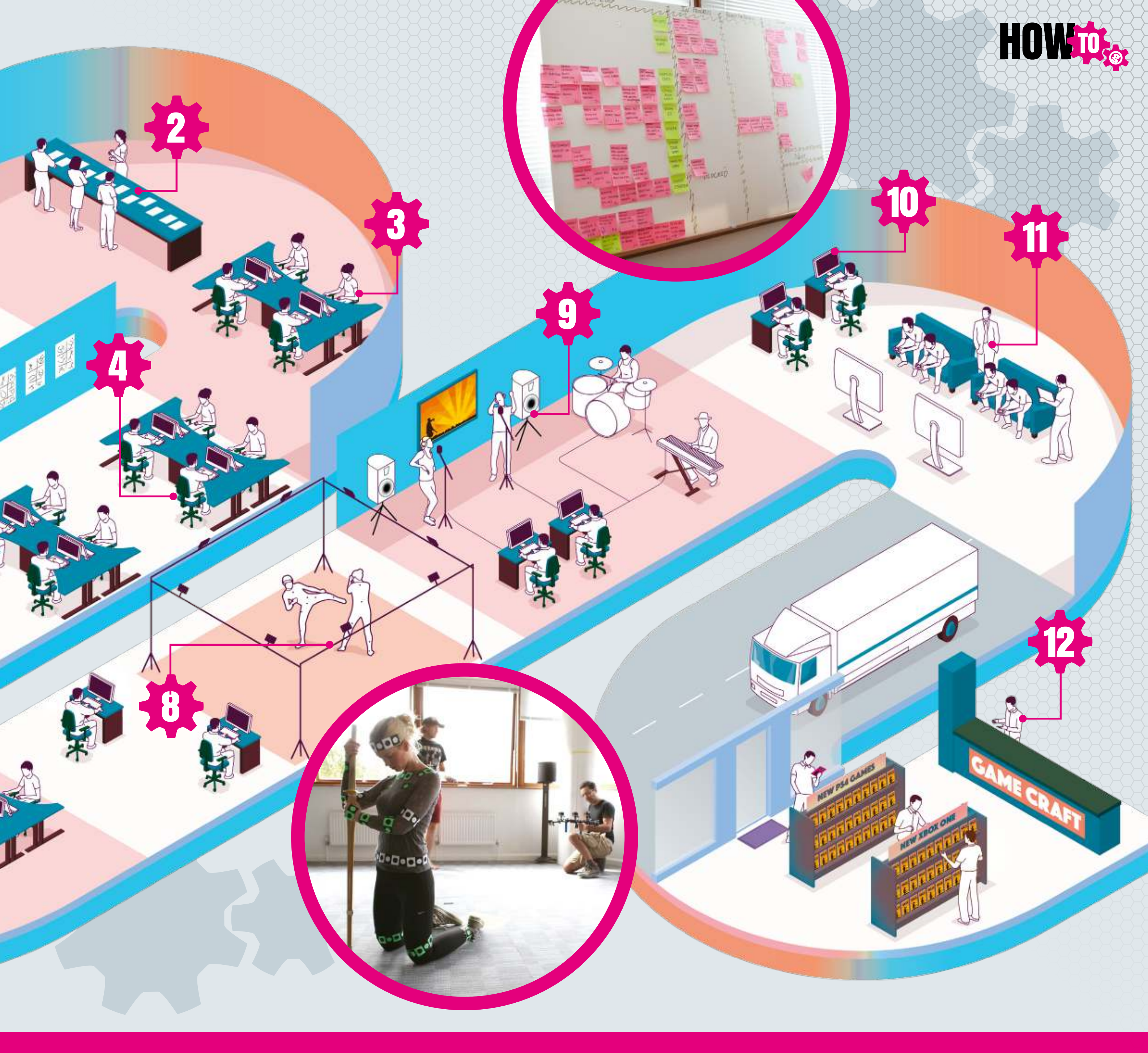
4 It can take years to design, code and iterate on game features, systems and mechanics, and this is where a programmer will spend the majority of their time. All of the interactive elements of the game run through the programming teams, ensuring that everything created for the game plays nicely within the game's engine and with the development tools the studio has access to.

WRITING

5 Writing as a standalone job role is a relatively new position in the industry. Previously, it would be down to the game designers to implement story and narrative design into the creation as they went. Now, writers and editors are an integral part of the overall process. The presence of writers on staff during the creation of games is a sign of an industry maturing.

ART AND ANIMATION

6 Videogames are, as far as triple-A design is concerned, largely a visual entertainment medium. It is the role of the artist on team to bring the worlds that we lose so many of our precious hours into to life; of the animators to give each and every character in the games a heart and personality, and give every moving piece of the game a purpose within it.



LEVEL AND CHARACTER DESIGN

7 Every character, object and level needs to be meticulously designed; designers and artists are tasked with translating the game's concepts from page and into code, finding a balance between functionality, playability and visual fidelity. Due to the dynamic nature of development, it isn't uncommon for levels to change dramatically over time.

MOTION-CAPTURE

8 Once the basic character models have been created, actors are brought in and equipped with special suits that read their movements and mannerisms in a 3D grid. Their actions can then be extrapolated and translated into in-engine sequences that programmers and animators can then apply into the game, triggering through certain inputs or commands.

AUDIO DESIGN

9 Depending on the scale of game being produced, the role of audio engineers and sound designers can vary. Typically, this is separated into three categories: sound effects, music and voice-over. Given the complexity of many titles, much of the music design must be dynamic, meaning composers must create tracks that can transition seamlessly in game.

SOCIAL & COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

10 Given the rise of social media, many studios have brought in support staff to help manage the social and community feeds. Responsible for keeping in touch with players directly, tracking engagement and response to the public releases, there's more emphasis than ever before on building gaming communities.

DEBUG AND QA

11 While many studios engage in public Alpha and Beta tests, there are still quality assurance tests occurring on early builds of the game in-office. These testers systematically play through the game attempting to break it, logging each and every error and glitch they encounter. QA has, traditionally, been seen as a great starting point for aspiring game designers.

POST-LAUNCH SUPPORT

12 Once a game goes 'Gold', the work isn't finished. It's here where those responsible for managing network infrastructure and getting servers ready for an influx of new players get to work; where marketing managers and PR reps prepare launch campaigns and where us game journalists sit awaiting the final code for review.



MANAGE A GAME PROJECT

MEDIA MOLECULE'S AWARD-WINNING STUDIO DIRECTOR **SIOBHAN REDDY** REVEALS WHAT IT TAKES TO RUN A STUDIO

How did you get to be in your current role?
A combination of graft and the luck of being in the right place at the right time! My parents had a family business and so I was working from when I was pretty young, which got me off to a good start in understanding how to work with people. I started off right at the bottom as a production assistant back in 1998, hired by my now-BFF Luci Black! My next role started as assistant producer at Criterion working for Fiona Sperry, which was pivotal in my learning what being a producer was all about. Then, in 2006, I was asked by Alex and Mark to join Media Molecule to run production for them, and so started as sort of EP/lead production/studio culture person. This led to me being recognised as studio director.

What does being a studio director entail day to day?
Let's take today for example, it's a busy one! This is what I have on my to-do list for today!

First, our content – does this need me to help steer anything? Today, yes for the morning as we are responding to some user feedback, and also planning next push!

People-wise, we have a new systems designer starting today, and so I will need to spend some time with her settling her in. I will also have a walk around and chat with people to see how people are, and from that figure out if I need to do any follow up chats with anyone.

Communication (marketing, PR and community)-wise, lots going on today as embargo lifts on some Aussie press we did last week, and so just keeping one eye on that, while also planning our next set of events with Abbie [Heppe] and Gemma [Abdeen].

Sony-wise, we are prepping for a couple of big annual meetings and meeting our new senior product manager on Thursday. We need to write a big update for Michael Denny, our Sony boss, so that he knows the latest updates on what's happening here at the studio.

What tips would you give someone wanting to run a development team?
I said "graft" earlier and it's really important to get the work completed to the right level of detail. Production and studio direction both require moving between the big picture and the granular detail. This is the best part, but can mean having to listen, take notes, read those notes, parse that information, connect dots and so on. It can mean that to help one person have a simple list, you need to bring together ten complicated things and well, and that's the job. Great producers do the graft effortlessly, but the good news is that practise doing this helps you find your own shortcuts/efficient processes.

A bit of advice that was given to me very early on was to always stay with the troops rather than operating from on-high. This is important, you must remain connected to the team so that you can understand the issues that are affecting them.

And make sure you have someone (your manager, or another manager) who is a good listener to help you when you need to offload, make sure you have a healthy routine. It can be a very stressful and emotional role, it's important to have ways to maintain your own mental health.

"A BIT OF ADVICE THAT WAS GIVEN TO ME VERY EARLY ON WAS TO ALWAYS STAY WITH THE TROOPS RATHER THAN OPERATING FROM ON-HIGH"

How important is getting a degree-level education to get into the industry?
I don't have a degree, but do dream of being able to do some study for my own enjoyment. I learnt on the job at Criterion. Most of the studio did go to university to study programming, art, animation or sound *but* it's not a prerequisite. It's important that you can demonstrate your ability, and that you can deal with the graft required to take an idea from beginning to end.

BECOME A PRODUCER

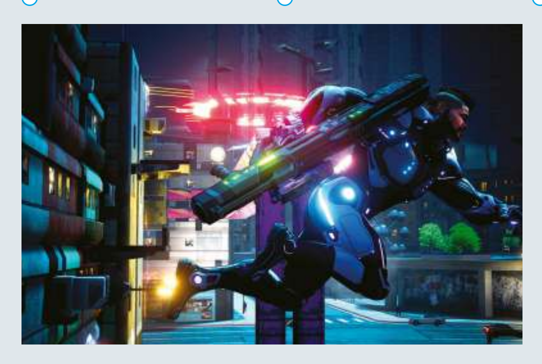
TEAM 17'S **CHRISTIE SANDY** ON WHAT IT TAKES TO WORK YOUR WAY UP FROM QA TO PRODUCTION

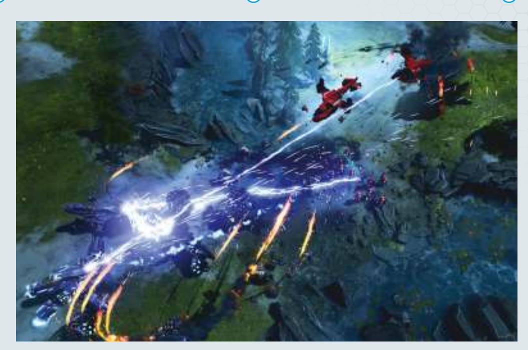


How did you get to be in your current role?
I achieved my current role by working my way through the ranks at Team17. It all started in March 2011 after I applied for a QA assistant job that was advertised on Twitter. I started my adventure by working on *Worms: Ultimate Mayhem*. In January 2013 I applied for a role in the production department as a production co-ordinator and a few months later became an assistant producer working on titles such as *Worms Revolution Extreme* and *Worms 3*. The team here are a great group of people to work with and I always receive support from my seniors in the production department. After gaining more experience by working on a variety of different projects, I was given the role of producer in July 2015.

What does your role actually entail day to day?
As a producer, you're always on the go! Each day I work with my internal and external teams to ensure the project we are working on is delivered on time and within budget. My day consists of managing schedules, mitigating project risks, reviewing milestones, chairing meetings and speaking to the team about their progress, then communicating our progress with management.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?
My top tips are to be organised and approachable. Being approachable means that your team feel they can speak to you if they have any worries about the project or if they want to highlight something that is not going to plan. Being organised is most important, as not only will you be managing people and schedules, you will also be managing your own workload, so keeping track of everything that needs to be done (and its priority) is very important!







SUMO DIGITAL'S AMIE MCKENZIE OFFERS ADVICE FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN ASSOCIATE PRODUCER ROLES

KNOW YOUR ROLE

1 To put what I do in a gaming context, producers are a support class; they are there on the back lines ensuring the frontline attackers are happy, healthy and that they're attacking the right target! We are here to make sure development runs smoothly and the whole team is working towards the same end goal, whether it be beating the end boss or saving the village.

BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING

2 You need to be prepared for both the ups and the downs that come with the role. It's a great opportunity to be a big part of the development team and is incredibly rewarding, but the producer must always put the project first and be able to see the big picture. Strong leadership, good communications and understanding of the team members and the development process are really important.

ORGANISATION IS KEY

3 It's a given that organisation is super important in a production role. Being able to manage a large amount of work and people plays a big part. Practice creating a number of different task-tracker methods; use a free program like Trello to get used to a scrum-board system, learn some more advanced formulas and formatting in Excel and try and pick up a scheduling tool like MS project to help manage work load.

LEARN THE TOOLS

4 Read about different project management methods like Scrum, Waterfall or Kanban, but paying to do a course on them is not always necessary. If a company wants you to have the qualification they will send you on the training once you're employed, having the knowledge is all you need to start with and will save you money! There are plenty of useful free guides online about the different methodologies, be sure to do some research.

GET EXPERIENCE

5 Don't assume you can walk straight into a production role with no industry experience. As it's important for production to have a good idea of how the development cycle works first-hand, new hires will often be chosen from fields such as QA. That's not to say you can't, it will just be quite difficult, as entry-level producer roles are incredibly popular. QA is a great place to start in the games industry and I think it helped me dramatically in becoming an effective producer.

PRODUCER INSIGHT

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY'S SENIOR PRODUCER MARCUS SHELDON TAKES A BREAK FROM WORKING ON A NEW UNANNOUNCED IP TO EXPLAIN HIS ROLE IN THE COMPANY



How did you get to be in your current role?
I started out as a production manager for a music website that made karaoke-style backing tracks. This led me into my first games-industry job as a content creator (level designer) for a music game, and it wasn't long until I got my first taste of production. I was made scrum master for our little team and I really enjoyed the team planning and content delivery work, so after a few other design roles, I focused fully on production.

What does your role actually entail day to day?
My day normally kicks off with several stand-up meetings with all the pod teams (scrum teams) I am responsible for, followed by resolution of any issues identified in these meetings. I can then focus on our next group of milestone goals and how we are progressing towards them. My role is essentially to work with the leads and directors to make sure we as a team deliver what we need to, within the time frame available – achieving that can be through planning, reviewing, prioritising, discussing problems and resolving issues, but often it is through a combination of these things.

What tips would you give someone aspiring to become a producer?
My secret to production is always do your best to plan for the unexpected, because production in game development is all about how quickly you deal with the numerous curve balls thrown at you. Start with your preferred plan but always think about a potential Plan B, C and D. That way you can react quickly to steer things back on course when issues inevitably come up.



BECOME A DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

DOVETAIL GAMES' **NAAILA CLEMENTS** PULLS BACK THE CURTAIN ON DEVELOPMENT MANAGER ROLES

What is a development manager responsible for?
I'm responsible for making sure that the work that it takes to build and maintain our games is planned out and completed on time, so I start my day checking the current state of play and seeing if there have been any new requests or changes that may impact the current schedule. I then have a daily stand up with my team, which is really important to see where we are with the week's tasks and what issues the team may have that need to be resolved that day to keep them all moving forward.

I cover multiple projects/franchises, so I have regular meetings to discuss progress, as well as to discuss the next stream of work or new features. There is lots of planning involved and I liaise closely with the development team to work out all the work that needs to be done for a new feature set, breaking these down into individual tasks and assigning those to specific people. These often have to be cross-checked with the other projects to make sure there is no overlap. I make sure that there is frequent dialogue between me and the team so we are always on the same page and deliver together.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?

1. Don't get too caught up in formal Project Management qualifications - I transitioned into my role by demonstrating strong organisational and planning skills, as well as being able to develop a relationship with people on all levels.
2. Don't be afraid to challenge people – if the data doesn't fit the plan then don't be afraid to speak up and let people know.
3. Be understanding of the work and the disciplines you are managing – it helps to know about what you are planning and trying to achieve, as well as the work styles of the people you are working with.





BECOME A GAME DIRECTOR

CREATIVE AND GAME DIRECTOR POSITIONS ARE AMONG THE MOST COVETED POSITIONS IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY, BUT WHAT DOES SUCH A ROLE ACTUALLY ENTAIL?

BE PREPARED

1 Depending on the size of the studio, the role of creative director / game director can vary wildly between projects. Largely speaking, a director is the force behind the creative aspects of a game, charged with leading production and in ensuring that the original vision (as outlined in the design document) is achieved in the best way possible.

HAVE MANY PROFICIENCIES

2 Much like a film director, it will be your vision that helps shape and define the final product. But that isn't done alone; it's done in collaboration with others. You'll need to have an understanding of all of the different moving parts, working with the development team to help achieve the technical, narrative, and aesthetic aspirations of each department.

START SMALL

3 If you aspire to work as a director in a studio environment, you should endeavour to start lower on the scale. Spend time in a design or producer role to get a sense of what is required to manage a project. Many directors take a hands-on role with production, while some manage the wider picture – you need to be comfortable with both.



Vorodi's credits are impressive, including early work with Nintendo on games like *Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt* to *Darksiders III* today with Gunfire Games.



MASTER THE ART OF LEVEL DESIGN

GUNFIRE GAME'S SENIOR LEVEL DESIGNER **RICHARD VORODI** TALKS ABOUT HIS PROFESSION

Does a level designer just get to sit around making combat arenas all day?

In a game like *Darksiders*, the level design is very complex and has a lot of moving parts. Designing the layout is a much smaller aspect to the process than most would think. Most of the time spent during production is keeping the levels running smoothly while artists and combat designers work within them.

Are the levels generally informed by the artwork, or before it has even been generated?

Initially the levels are conceived with small blocks that signify the shape of the room and make up of the terrain and jumps, etc. Once artists begin making those spaces beautiful and something that you'd actually want to play through new issues arise. Oftentimes with the added detail in rooms, players get lost or objectives become obscured. Protecting or iterating the gameplay of the space often becomes most of my focus during the day.

How can one of our readers become a level designer?

It used to be a requirement to join a video game company to make games, but now with so many tools available online, the best way to enter the field of video game creation is just to create your own stuff and put it out on the Internet. Of course, you may be wishing to work with a big team of creative folks. In that case, with no experience I've known tons of people who started in the QA department and learned on the side. Oftentimes it's just about getting your foot in the door, showing some initiative, and being so amazing to work with that they can't let you go!

LEARN TO COMPROMISE

4 It might be your vision that's seeing a project through, but you'll need to be capable of compromise. Videogame development is a technical medium, and that means working to deadlines, a budget, and team of creatives is necessary for success. Sometimes that will mean compromising your vision in service of the overall project.

STUDY GAME DESIGN

5 Playing games isn't enough, you need to study game design. Having a great idea for a game isn't enough, you need to know how mechanics and systems could function to make it an engaging and interesting experience for your audience. Study your favourite games and try to work out how they work at a fundamental level.

BUILD YOUR OWN GAME

6 If you want to start perfecting your skills as a director now, why not start be building your own game? It's cheaper and easier than ever to get started; either start basic, building interesting systems and mechanics without worrying about art assets, or try to assemble a small team of friends. If you create something good enough, it might just stick.



IMPART YOUR VISION

TEAM 17 CREATIVE DIRECTOR **KEVIN CARTHEW** DISCUSSES HIS VARIOUS RESPONSIBILITIES



Can you explain what it is that a creative director is responsible for?

My role basically alternates between the day-to-day management of the department and overseeing the creative direction each of our games is taking, specifically regarding the design of the game. At the start of a project I'll work with the production department to assign the right designers to the project. When we have a lead designer, we'll work to make sure we set aims for the project, shape the game early on, and determine exactly how we'll go about ensuring that the vision for the game remains on track. We can do various things to achieve this, for example, writing design documentation and creating prototypes. We do this to try and ensure as much as possible that we prove our ideas for the game are the right ones before we commit full teams to them.

So, most of the time my day-to-day work is overseeing and providing feedback, advice and support to help the designers keep things consistent with that initial vision. The other side of the role is managing the department to make sure we have the right staff and resources to make our games the best they can be. This involves recruiting, setting the agenda for training and appraising overall standards of work on a regular basis.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?

My advice would be to work in the industry if you can (but you also have to want to!) I took the route of joining QA, it was a way into games and I learned from observing how games are made by being around development teams. Even if you can't join an established company, you should be interested in games and the business of making games. If you want to be hired as a designer the most important thing, in my opinion, is having a strong portfolio that reflects real development skills as well as creativity. You should be well read on games design, know something about UI/UX design, and nowadays it's a huge help to know something about either Unity or Unreal development.

You should be interested in making games, but you should also try to think commercially – think of it as a product that will one day go out into the world, think about how people will respond to it, think about why people would take notice of your game over somebody else's. Keep the end user in mind. As well as all of that, you should always be prepared to listen to people and work with people.

BE A GAME WRITER

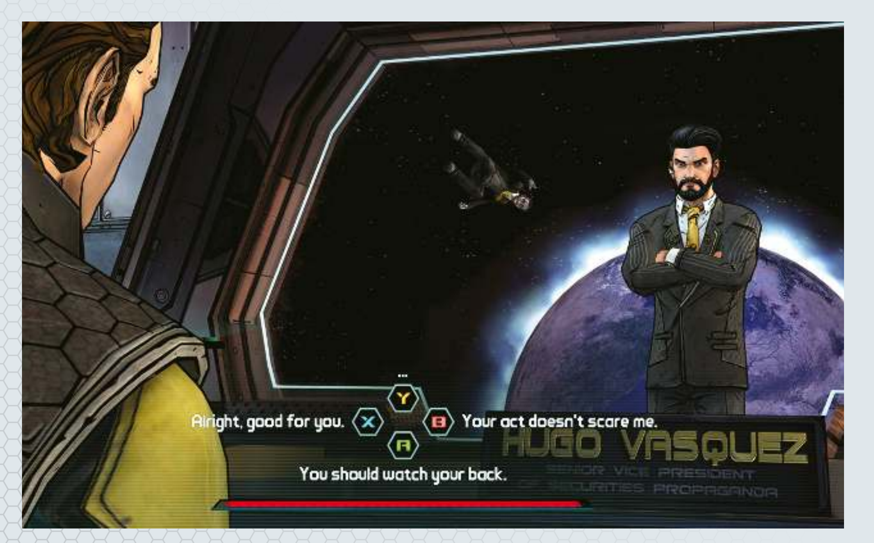
PRACTICING THE CRAFT OF VIDEOGAME WRITING AND NARRATIVE DESIGN IS NEVER EASY, SO WE REACHED OUT TO SOME OF THE BEST IN THE BUSINESS TO OFFER ADVICE TO YOU FLEDGLING WRITERS

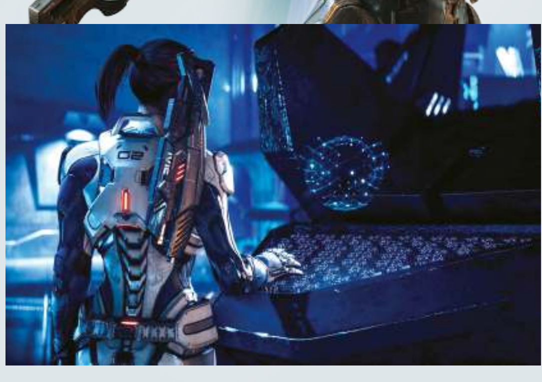
VIDEOGAMES ARE UNLIKE TRADITIONAL ENTERTAINMENT IN THAT THEY ARE INTERACTIVE BY DESIGN. WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU OFFER TO A READER LOOKING TO WRITE WITHIN SUCH AN EXCITING (AND SOMEWHAT DAUNTING) FORMAT?



ERIC STRIPE,
SENIOR WRITER, TELLTALE

An important thing to remember when writing for games is that you need to be okay with audiences never seeing some of your best stuff. You could write the most amazing, touching, heartfelt conversation between two characters, and a huge number of players will ignore it entirely. Players skip stunning cutscenes, wander away during beautiful character moments, and talk over that lore you painstakingly crafted… watching a Let's Play of your work will make you want to pull your hair out. But instead of grieving, you need to use it as motivation to make every moment great. Be okay with having that awesome line on an obscure branch of your dialogue tree. Pack your game and your story full of surprises and small touches that'll make people think twice before skipping cutscenes. They'll probably still do it, but at least you get the satisfaction of knowing you made them think twice about it.





WHAT SHOULD WRITERS BE AWARE OF WHEN CONSTRUCTING SCENES OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHARACTERS?



SAM MAGGS,
ASSISTANT WRITER, BIOWARE

So many things! Both the best and most challenging part of games writing is the constraints you're given – [how] the box you have to work in changes depending on the game you're making.

If you're writing for an RPG, you want to try avoiding giving the player character dialogue that they might not choose to say themselves (eg, forcing the protagonist to say something angry when you, the player, would rather be sarcastic); if you're working on an action game, you'll try to aim for the opposite - giving your protagonist a strong and defined voice (think Nathan Drake). Then you want to think about the technical limitations of the game you're making: it might be easy to write about how you're about to escape this prison on the backs of 17 unicorns, for example, but if your artist doesn't have the time to draw or rig you unicorns, it's not going to happen. Beyond practical considerations, though, what I always try to remember when writing characters is that games are supposed to be fun; at the end of the day, you want to create characters that players want to hang out with, or smooch, or slap, or all three at the same time, even. If I'm having fun writing them, hopefully someone else will have fun playing them.



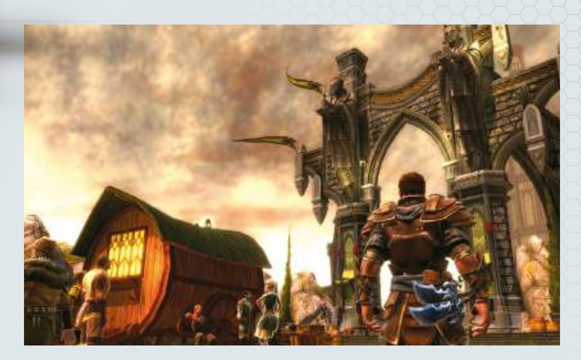
WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN EDITOR GO OVER YOUR WORK WHEN TRYING TO DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS AS A WRITER/NARRATIVE DESIGNER?



OLIVIA WOOD,
WRITER/EDITOR, FAILBETTER GAMES (BREAKTHROUGH BRIT, BAFTA)

Writers can rarely edit their own work, because good editing requires some distance. They may also be focused on the individual piece and be unaware of how it fits into a larger picture – within a game, company or IP. At the very least, editors can pick out problems with a specific piece – less about grammar, more about pacing and plot. Will the player feel delighted as mysteries unfurl, or will they feel deceived and frustrated? Working with an editor over time also helps develop crucial skills – highlighting and encouraging powerful writing, and helping kill bad habits.

As narrative editor at Failbetter Games, I check continuity, ensure consistency with in-game lore, give feedback on whether the characters are convincing, the story is satisfying and player choices feel meaningful. By forcing a writer to consistently produce their best work, the quality of everything they do rises.

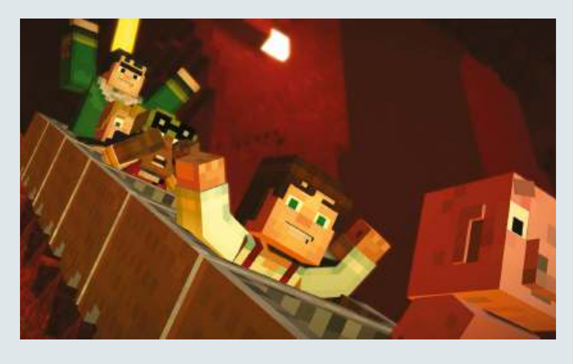


WHAT SHOULD WRITERS LOOK TO FOR INSPIRATION WHEN IT COMES TO BUILDING BETTER NARRATIVES?



ALEX HORN,
SENIOR NARRATIVE DESIGNER, UBISOFT REFLECTIONS

Look to diverse sources for inspiration. Diversity is strength, and the more tools you have in your narrative toolbox, the more you will be able to accomplish when working with narrative. So read, play, watch, listen to and appreciate all forms of art you can find. Also, persistence is a requirement. Everyone meets with rejection and failure. The nice thing about working with narrative is that we can add those experiences directly to the toolbox.



WHAT SHOULD PROSPECTIVE WRITERS BE AWARE OF BEFORE TRYING TO MAKE THE LEAP INTO THE INDUSTRY?



ERIC STRIPE,
SENIOR WRITER, TELLTALE

In the videogame industry there is absolutely no room for egos, especially with writers. You might have a glamorous vision of yourself sitting at your desk, dreaming up the next great interactive blockbuster… but the reality isn't quite so romantic. Instead, you'll be writing a thousand lines the night before voice recording to cover every single outcome of a puzzle. Or figuring out how to write the most palatable version of awkward tutorial dialogue. But If you can do things like that on time while keeping a level head and a smile on your face, your team will love you for it. And that's the awesome part about writing games that'll keep you from tearing your hair out: the team. Sure, you'll be working long hours, but you'll be doing it in the trenches, alongside insanely talented and passionate artists, programmers, designers, producers, and if you leave that ego at the door and learn to embrace the chaos, you might get to be a part of something really special.

HONE YOUR WRITING

GHOST STORY GAMES' KEN LEVINE – WRITER AND CREATIVE LEAD ON SYSTEM SHOCK 2, BIOSHOCK AND BIOSHOCK INFINITE – ON UNDERSTANDING AND OBSERVING NARRATIVE DESIGN

What advice would you share with somebody looking to be a writer in the industry?
A videogame writer should understand, at least to a fundamental degree, all elements of game development. If your story doesn't exploit what the game does well and avoid what it does poorly, the narrative will suffer.

The videogame medium has a rather unique form and unique demands to go with it. How can would-be writers begin to observe narrative design?
You used the word 'observation'. That's exactly it. Play games. Watch movies and television shows. Read books. Try to understand not just what art makes you feel, but *how* it makes you feel that way. If you love a particular scene or sequence, figure out *why* you love it. What's happening in the scene? Why does it work? What elements had to be there earlier to make it work?

Go watch the scene in *The Godfather Part II* where Michael confronts Fredo. How did the characters get to that moment? And how did Francis Ford Coppola establish the sibling rivalry concept, and how did it morph to fit into the unique world he created? How did he shoot it, with Fredo appearing tiny in that ridiculous chair, to frame the imbalance in their relationship with a visual element? Every line, every camera movement, is motivated by the *conflict* between the *characters*.

Once you get a handle on narrative in general, games make special demands of writers. Building and animating 3D characters is one of the most expensive things we do. Even then, videogame characters aren't yet as expressive as humans on-screen. But to avoid a 'lite' version of 'real' narrative, a writer has to exploit the elements unique to the videogame.

Put story elements in the environment and learn to grow comfortable if people miss them. You don't control the game. The player does. Give them the sense of discovery in your narrative. A player will value an element they *discover* more than one that's forced down their throat.

What do you believe the number-one misunderstanding people have about game writing is?
I would imagine it's hard for people to understand how technical game writing is. People assume ideas matter. But ideas matter far less than the execution of an idea, ie: how you engineer an idea so it has the maximal impact on the audience. That's the hard part, but it's also incredibly satisfying.

What does your day-to-day actually entail these days?
It's really different depending on the day.



When I'm writing, I'm usually home, chained to my computer for days at a time. A lot of my creative work (breaking out game design elements, plots, etc) happens on my runs, which tend to go for hours. I use a voice recorder app on my phone to take notes, which are then transcribed and brought to future meetings, or go right into a script. Office days, I tend to be in meetings, one after the other, all day. When we're close to shipping a game, my workload lightens and I come out of my cave and interact with fans and do some press, mostly in NY, LA and Europe.

A good amount of each day also goes into interacting with fans, students, and other devs over social media. I do a lot of Skype calls with students and developers who are just starting out as well. I've also been advising a young woman in Pakistan who has built a training academy for devs there (www.pixelartga.com/).

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?
I love my job, and it is very fulfilling creatively to see fans interact with the game and identify with the world that we build and the stories we tell. I will say that it's a lot of work, and the strain of running a company can seriously impact your ability to lead a normal, healthy life. A creative life is difficult, and an entrepreneurial life can be even harder. I'd take a look at this piece I wrote about getting into the industry. It goes a lot deeper on the topic: (www.bit.ly/IGLevine).





ANNA HOLLINRAKE

SENIOR ARTIST, DREAM REALITY INTERACTIVE

After making a start at small indie outfits, Hollinrake landed a job at Climax where she rose through the ranks to become senior artist. She was recognised as a Breakthrough Brit of 2017 by BAFTA and now works at Dream Reality Interactive.



HARRIET K. LACEY

UI ARTIST, CLIMAX STUDIOS

After taking an interest in the design of user interfaces for mobile games, Lacey built a strong portfolio that helped her secure a job at Climax. You'll be able to check out her work in Surf World Series and Adventure Time: Pirates of the Enchiridion



NAJ OSMANI

CONCEPT ARTIST, REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS

Entering the industry in 2015 as a junior marketing artist, Osmani quickly proved his capacity for sketching gorgeous worlds and evocative characters, finally becoming a full time concept artist.



JESS MAGNUS

3D ENVIRONMENT ARTIST, DOVETAIL GAMES

After a handful of years working in the mobile game space, Magnus eventually took the leap into larger scale PC simulation games, where she now holds down a position as 3D environment artist for Dovetail.



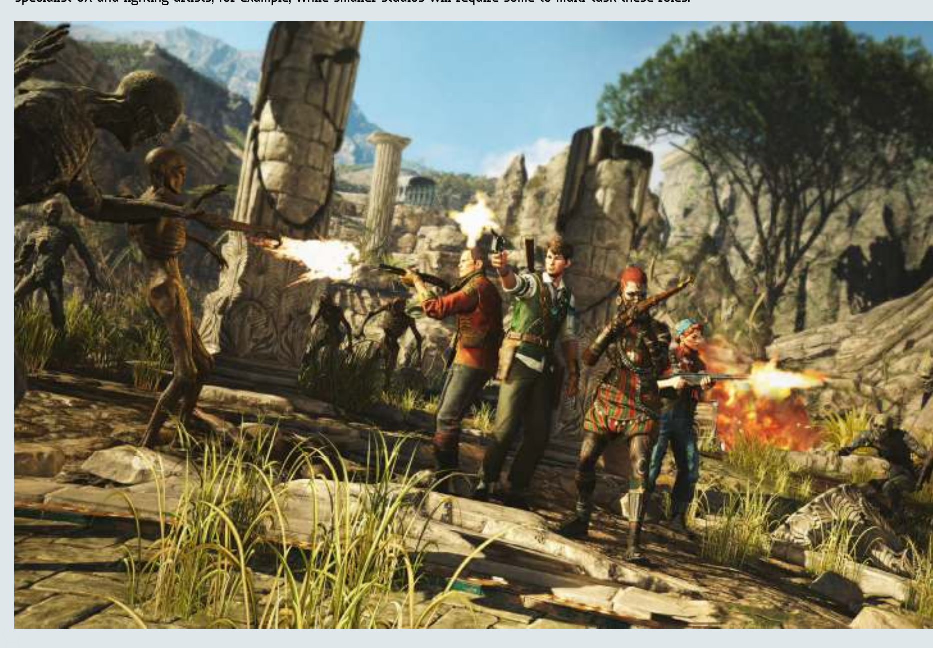
MEG OWENSON

CONCEPT ARTIST, SUMO DIGITAL

Want to know how you can secure a position in the industry? Owenson found her way in after a producer found saw her online portfolio. Now she is responsible for delivering concepts of Sumo Digital's biggest and most exciting new releases.



■ While we covered a number of the major roles here, there are other art positions in the industry. Bigger studios will often look for specialist UX and lighting artists, for example, while smaller studios will require some to multi-task these roles.



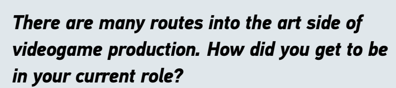
■ Having a diverse portfolio is important, as is identifying what you do and do not enjoy drawing. While you won't always get to draw what you want as part of a wider team, it is good to know your strengths and weaknesses.



■ A university degree isn't the be all, end all when it comes to becoming an artist for a videogame, but you will need to have a strong command over your chosen form. Your portfolio will be the best representation of this, so be sure to spend a lot of your spare time building it.

HOW TO BECOME AN ARTIST

VIDEOGAMES ARE A VISUAL MEDIUM, AND THE DEMANDS ON ARTISTS ONLY CONTINUE TO INCREASE. HERE, WE SPEAK WITH FIVE TO GET A SENSE OF THE VARIOUS PATHS INTO GAME ART, WHAT IT TAKES TO SURVIVE, AND HOW THE ROLE INTEGRATES WITH THE WIDER TEAMS WITHIN A DEVELOPMENT STUDIO



There are many routes into the art side of videogame production. How did you get to be in your current role?

Anna Hollinrake: I was very lucky in that I got obsessed with digital painting in my mid teens. It began with drawing truly dreadful manga, but I moved into concept art and illustration after realising that someone made the art from the loading screens in *Fable 2*. Games were the best vehicle in which I could create the art I wanted to see. After some intense misery trying fine art for a year, I studied Game Art at De Montfort University, which led to me learning 3D environment art and expanding my skill set enough to be pretty handy as a generalist artist.

Harriet K Lacey: Getting a job in UI takes a great eye for graphical art and a portfolio that you've worked on in your own time. I studied illustration at university, and began working on iOS apps in my third year, which after coding and creating the interface myself, made me aware of UI roles in the industry. A lot of artists I've spoken to had some kind of gateway interest like this, rather than the specific role itself. To be very honest, a university education can be a bit useless for unique roles such as UI or VFX – they are not, generally, taught in depth. My best advice would be to put in personal time; my first industry job I achieved through a portfolio entirely done at home.

Naj Osmani: I was freelancing for maybe about five years, diligently studying, honing my craft, when one of my friends, an artist at Rebellion, recommended I try out for a marketing illustrator position there. And I really enjoyed it – it offered loads of cool opportunities, but my real passion has always been in concept art. Luckily, a position opened up at Rebellion, and I was able to make the move.

Jess Magnus: After graduating from university, my portfolio was sent forward to a games studio in London. As a result, I was taken on as a 3D artist intern. The internship was based on the Creative Skillset Trainee Finder, a program put in place to encourage companies to hire graduates. I was happy working in mobile games, but I was eager to take a step towards PC games and work with a larger studio. This was when I applied to Dovetail Games for the role of environment artist. I feel that my experience and variety in my first job really helped towards my application for Dovetail, as it gave me a variety of knowledge that I can now bring to my current team.

Meg Owenson: I got into my current role via a senior producer at Sumo seeing my online portfolio and asking if I would like to come concept Snake Pass. I worked on that game until release, and then was asked if I would like a permanent position, and I then moved onto concepting one of the biggest projects at the studio. Before I came to Sumo, I completed my Fine Art degree at Leeds College of Art, and had been working for several years both freelance and in-house on several projects and for many companies.

Artistic roles tend to vary between studios. Can you give us an insight into what kinds of things you are expected to do?

AH: It really depends on the stage of a project! As both a concept and environment artist, I often find myself working to very loose briefs, given I can rough out concepts of scenes and assets, then model, texture and assemble levels in engine. It helps being able to do a lot of different things, because I get a lot of creative freedom and ownership in the process! By and large though, it'll always involve me co-ordinating with designers »





WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TECHNICAL ARTIST

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY'S LEAD TECHNICAL ARTIST, **JODIE AZHAR**, PULLS BACK THE CURTAIN ON THIS ROLE THAT FUSES ART AND TECHNOLOGY



IT'S A FUSION OF VARIOUS ROLES

"As a technical artist, you spend your time enabling artists to realise their vision for the game. This involves working with them to solve technical problems to improve the visual quality of the art, changing the way the assets render, adding new art features and improving the performance of the art assets in the game."

IT REQUIRES COLLABORATION

"We help come up with solutions by applying our technical knowledge and translating artists' requests to the code teams who implement improvements in-game. We also help expedite the art workflows to make it faster for artists to create their work correctly and reduce human error in the creation process, and when setting up the art in the game engine."

IT'S VARIED

"You also get to work on a range of different tasks, one day improving the VFX pipeline, and environment art the next. We get to work very closely with both the art and programming teams to solve these art challenges, so you get to have a big impact on the way the game looks."

AND YOU'LL NEED PATIENCE

"You need to love solving problems, as this is the biggest part of the role. You also need to be a great team player, as we work very closely with artists, so we need to be able to discuss ideas and help translate their vision into technical solutions and communicate ideas to programmers. And while you need to love art, you also need to be comfortable with scripting so that you can write tools to help solve problems in 3D asset creation software."

BECOME AN ANIMATOR

COATSINK'S **BIANCA IANCU** ON THE DAILY LIFE OF ANIMATION IN GAMING



How did you get to be in your current role?
A mix of luck, opportunity and hard work set me on an indirect path. I got to study Computer Character Animation at uni, but went on to work as a games artist for two years following graduation. I continued learning and improving my animation on the side, and then eventually got this role a year ago. I was also attending lots of related social events at the time and meeting new people working in games. Luckily, I met our CEO [of Coatsink] at Develop Conference in Brighton, and had a chance to talk to him a bit about the company, which helped a lot when applying.

What is an animator responsible for at a games studio?
It changes depending on each project, so it's never monotonous. It can vary from looking at spreadsheets and speaking with programmers, to solving problems or fixing bugs to attending team review meetings, giving feedback to other animators on my team and filming, or gathering reference footage; I spend most of my time animating between Unity and Maya.

I start mornings by implementing feedback notes received from our Lead the evening before. Then a bit later we have daily stand-ups where the project team gather together, and everyone in turn says what tasks they completed yesterday, what they plan to get done on the current day, and if anything's blocking their progress. The producer usually chairs this, and makes sure to answer any questions and unblock people.

What would you say the best part/aspect of your role as an animator is?
Seeing a finished animation and knowing I made a bunch of pixels look alive is just the coolest feeling, especially when there's a chance to add personality. Witnessing people reacting to our characters in playthroughs is a close second. Working with an entire team of incredibly skilled animators and watching their work develop is pretty high up there too.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?
As with any other creative role, a thick skin is vital for absorbing rejection and all kinds of feedback professionally rather than personally. Stepping back from your work often and asking for this feedback is also just as important. Have lots of patience and perseverance because it's going to take practice, time and effort to get things right. You will never advance unless you master the basics first, so do this by finishing lots of small, simple pieces before moving onto more complicated stuff.

Read *The Animator's Survival Kit* and *The Illusion Of Life* cover to cover. Get over any camera-shyness, because you're going to have to film yourself for reference – a lot. Observe life around you as much as you can. Pause and enjoy watching how leaves fall or how an animal treads its feet, because this is where you're going to find all the valuable little details you need to make your work shine. Always stay open to new and more efficient ways of doing things. Refining the collection of habits you form when approaching each new shot is going to save you valuable time to spend in the right places. Remember to stretch.

to bring scenes to life in the best way possible, balancing technical restrictions, artistic vision, and what we can achieve in the time we have!

HKL: UI, like any role, varies from studio to studio. Usually I am working as the main UI artist on long projects, though as an individual with graphic design skills, you can expect yourself to be stepping in with pitch work, marketing and other disciplines. At Climax, UI artists are hands-on and do a lot of engine work themselves. Not every studio does this, but it is an invaluable way of working for understanding your art within engine. Usually my workload is made up of self-managed individual tasks, but I also work closely under strong mentorship with my former UI-Lead, now art director at Climax Studios, Lauren Woodroffe.

NO: In a nutshell I'm drawing and painting a whole lot! My job involves designing stuff from a brief. What I'm designing can be anything – props, environments, characters, which I'm doing at the moment. I create preliminary concepts, and then go back and forth with an art director, revising and amending, and solving the problems that they find. once everything's approved, things move onto the next stages of the pipeline, such as 3D art.

JM: The major chunk of my work involves the creation of 3D assets for our product, *Train Sim World*. This involves the creation of both hard surface assets such as buildings and props, and the creation of foliage and vegetation. We work with UE4, so the pipeline for me involves creating the asset and then getting it working and usable in-game. I also spend a lot of my time working with our engineers to learn more about the technical side of the product, and then going on to use these skills to improve optimisation and make general game improvements.

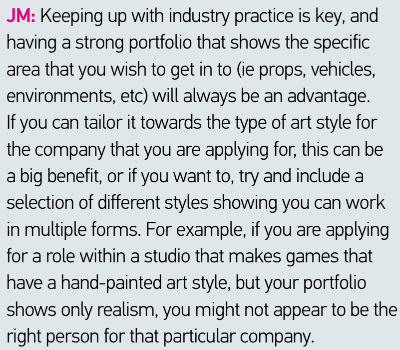
MO: My role consists of coming in early each morning, checking what tasks I have for the day, and then spending my time visual problem solving. My job is rarely about creating beautiful illustrations – that's probably only about ten per cent of the role; the rest is working with the design team, art director and animators to work out suitable visual design solutions that could be implemented into the game. Each day is different, which for me is refreshing. One day I might be working out a character design, and the next I'm designing a gameplay object and environment, both require a different set of skills. Within a game pipeline there isn't room for specialisation; you need to be able to do everything well.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?
AH: Don't beat yourself up if you're interested in a whole load of different stuff – it makes your voice dynamic and engaging! Tools can be learned, but your taste is incredibly important, so never stop finding new stuff that excites you. Your best bet is listening to what brings you joy and following that voice. If you start drawing realistic mechs just because you feel like you have to, all it's going to do is get you hired to make more realistic mechs – which will make you pretty miserable, pretty quickly. Be kind, be visible, and be inquisitive. Oh, and make sure you stretch your hands regularly!

HKL: I would recommend taking a chunk of personal time to work on your portfolio, which should be quality over quantity. Diversity within your work is very important, and it's great to show a range of styles. Some understanding of engines is great – the internet is at your disposal for getting some background information in before your first interview. Try not to get too bogged down or intimidated by this process; start applying as soon as you can. Generally, however, my best advice would be to remember that everyone must start somewhere! When you start, your studio will understand your beginner experience level. Try not to worry, it'll happen!



"SEEING A FINISHED ANIMATION AND KNOWING I MADE A BUNCH OF PIXELS LOOK ALIVE IS JUST THE COOLEST FEELING"
BIANCA IANCU



JM: Keeping up with industry practice is key, and having a strong portfolio that shows the specific area that you wish to get in to (ie props, vehicles, environments, etc) will always be an advantage. If you can tailor it towards the type of art style for the company that you are applying for, this can be a big benefit, or if you want to, try and include a selection of different styles showing you can work in multiple forms. For example, if you are applying for a role within a studio that makes games that have a hand-painted art style, but your portfolio shows only realism, you might not appear to be the right person for that particular company.

MO: You will be up against a lot of competition for every role, so you need to be prepared to put in the effort to learn everything you can, and practice. These days, it is very beneficial to know 3D and matte painting skills, as well as various software packages, but more crucial than that is having a strong grounding in the traditional skills; rendering form, perspective, colour theory, values and anatomy.

How important is it to attend university before beginning to apply for roles?

NO: Studying hard and honing your craft is the way to go about it. To be specific, *the* way to go about it: You have to study in a smart way and, if you can, you need to look to mentors – perhaps people who are in the industry – that can help guide you. It can be really expensive to go to an art school – if you can go that way then of course it's recommended, and if you can find the right teachers, mentors and the right education then it's probably the fastest way in. If, however, you haven't got the resources or, like me, you haven't had the opportunity to go to a reputable art school, you can look to online portals – there are lots of places with a lot of information and resources available.

JM: If you can get any form of internship or work experience this can be a big help, otherwise participating in extra activities such as game jams, or even working on personal projects, can really boost your portfolio and help you to stand out from the crowd. With regards to applying for roles, I find it most important to be confident in yourself and your work. If you are not confident, you could lose out on possible opportunities because of it.

Finally, I think it's important to be aware of how wide and varied the games industry is, and to be open to working for different companies. You may not instantly get into your dream job, but working in a variety of companies, such as a mobile studio [or] triple-A… will give you such a broad range of knowledge that it will make you really appreciate the different working environments.

MO: Going to university is certainly not required. A good portfolio will stand out with or without a degree, and you can take advantage of the gigantic online resources and tutorials available from current industry professionals. If, however, you do go to university, use this time to study something design related. Product design, industrial design, architecture and automotive design will all help for a career in concept art. Or take a degree that will broaden how you see the world; the greatest inspiration you will find for concepting is by just looking at what already exists in the world.



GET A JOB IN QA

ONE OF GAMING'S MOST IMPORTANT AND VERSATILE ROLES EXPLAINED

GAME TESTING

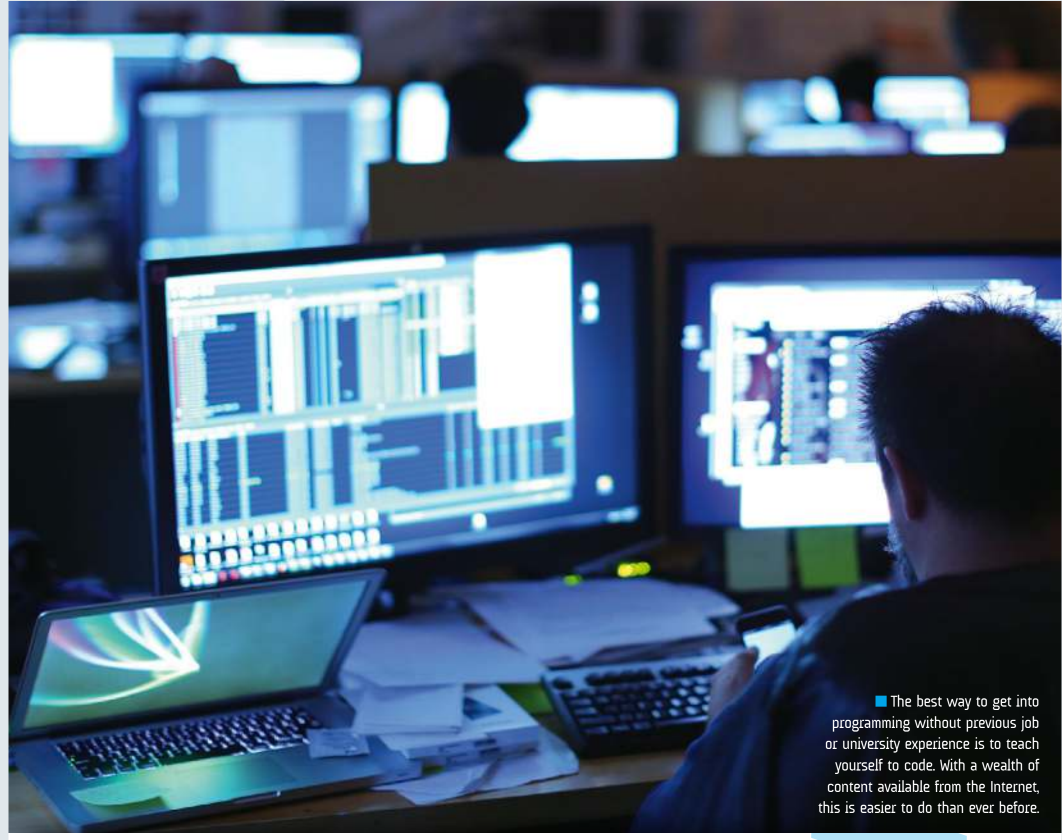
1 Again and again in the people we spoke to for our insight into roles in the games industry the way in which they started was in some form of QA. But what is QA? Well, it stands for quality assurance, and it's typically used in the later stages of development (smart teams make sure it's implemented throughout design and multiple milestones). The job is to test the game for bugs and sometimes deliberately seek to break the game in order to stress test what the product is capable of.

GAME BREAKING

2 So, in essence, your job as a QA tester is to play a broken game and see how much further you can break it. What you learn then needs to be communicated to the various departments of the developer as it looks to fix any issues the QA tester has found. That could be some simple level-design issues, something in animation or something more fundamental like a character design not reading in quite the right way. QA is the last line of defence and the first line of critical reception for a project.

CAREER BUILDING

3 How is it that it seems to lead to so many other positions in gaming? Well, there's no great surprise in it, as while being a QA Tester doesn't require any specific game-development background to succeed, it does expose you to every aspect of game development, allows testers to engage with members of the team, build communication skills and get a great appreciation for how all the pieces fit together. As a result QA testers can often find they have a passion for a particular part of the development process and can seek advice and training in that field, or could find themselves with enough experience to oversee a project in a producer role.



The best way to get into programming without previous job or university experience is to teach yourself to code. With a wealth of content available from the Internet, this is easier to do than ever before.

BE A PROGRAMMER

IF IT'S A COMPLEX WORLD OF CODING THAT YOU WANT, A ROLE IN PROGRAMMING IS WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

Programming is an integral part of game development, essentially putting you in charge of designing, writing or maintaining the computer code that runs and controls various aspects of a videogame. Making videogames is an increasingly complex process, and that means programming roles are constantly shifting depending on the demands of a project, size of a team or complexity of a required task or system. You'll need to learn a programme such as C++ or C, be deadline driven, possess excellent communication skills, absolutely *love* maths and be highly organised. If that sounds like the job for you, here is just a handful of the roles now open in the games industry at most major studios.

GENERAL PROGRAMMER

1 Generalist programmers are known to be widely proficient with a number of systems and tools, working to hunt bugs in the code, determine what the problem could be and recommend the necessary specialist to assist should the fix not be immediately apparent. It's a great way into this side of the business, should you be au fait with the basics of coding.

TOOLS PROGRAMMER

2 A tools programmer is there to make everybody's life easier, writing custom tools and scripts that help speed up a variety of game-development headaches, such as importing art assets and level editing. A tools programmer may also be responsible for building out specific new systems to support new types of gameplay experiences.

AI PROGRAMMER

3 Enemies and NPCs don't move around and act on their own, you know. An AI programmer is responsible for simulating the intelligence, pathfinding, strategy and tactics. This is one of the most in-demand roles in the game-programming world. Patience and attention to detail are must have qualities to do this kind of work.

PHYSICS ENGINE PROGRAMMER

4 Dedicated to developing the physics systems a game will employ, the difficulty and complexity of this task scales dependent on the project and the specific requirements of a game's combat and movement systems, not to mention its setting and world state.

PORTING PROGRAMMER

5 Games don't just move from one system or platform to the next without some sort of optimisation and magic. That's where the porting programmer comes in, often converting code from one system to another – rewriting huge swaths of code in the process – and working to ensure that the game can function on the new platform.

GRAPHICS PROGRAMMER

6 Those that posses a firm grasp of advanced mathematical concepts – that are capable of systemic and organised thought patterns – might just find that they have what it takes to be a 3D graphics programmer, a highly skilled job that handles complex renders and optimisation tasks.

BECOME A SENIOR SERVER PROGRAMMER

SUMO DIGITAL'S **UMAR MUSTAFA** ON WHAT IT TAKES TO JOIN A COMPANY'S CORE TECH TEAM



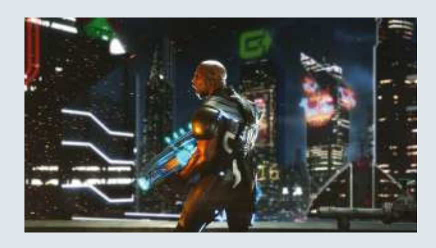
How did you get your start in the industry?
I was born and raised in Pakistan. Having access to computers from an early age, I started coding when I was a teenager. So naturally, towards the end of my university education I got together with a few friends and we started working on some ideas for web apps. This was late-2000s, when Facebook games were doing very well. We decided to create a Facebook game to understand how they are made, and it took off in the local market as the first game of its kind for Facebook from Pakistan. That gave me a good opportunity to stand out and I found myself in the games industry. Since then I've had roles involving both gameplay programming and server development at a few games studios in Pakistan and then one in Germany, before I finally decided to focus on server side development for triple-A games and found my current role at Sumo Digital's Sheffield studio.

What is a server programmer responsible for?
As a server programmer I'm responsible for creating various services that allow our game teams to store game-related data online, or to collect important information about the games – for example, the number of people who played one of our games in the last week. Most of this work involves writing code in various programming languages like C# and JavaScript. I also keep an eye on the deployed services to make sure they are up and running. Apart from that, every now and then I participate in team discussions about how we'll create new services or improve existing ones.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?
Game development is just like any other software development, just more exciting and fun. The best advice I can give would be to learn to code, and practice a lot. If you don't have a programming-related job, create personal projects in your free time. That's a great way to display your skills and knowledge. And always keep yourself up to date with new tech related to the role you're aiming for.







GET INTO GAME AUDIO

TEAM 17'S LEAD AUDIO ENGINEER **OLI WOOD** AND GRIMLORE GAMES' AUDIO DIRECTOR & COMPOSER **BASTIAN KIESLINGER** ON GETTING INTO A HIGHLY CONTESTED SECTION OF THE INDUSTRY



LISTEN TO EVERYTHING

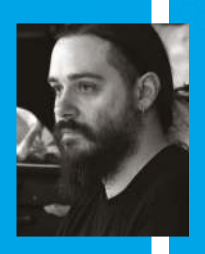


1 **OLI WOOD** Be a game-audio sponge! There is a wealth of content freely available online and a bunch of audio/developer communities full of talented individuals willing to help. Home studio equipment has never been more accessible, so build a small home studio and buy a portable recorder... I swear that portable recorder will become your best friend

BE PASSIONATE

2 **OLI WOOD** Try and attend any game audio/dev events and network your socks off. Show how passionate you are about what you do and push to get your audio into their games. I would much rather hear your work and see how it was implemented than watch a sound replacement video you have put together.

COLLECT KNOWLEDGE



3 **BASTIAN KIESLINGER** If you want to work as an audio director for games, collect all the knowledge you can. Not only about audio-related things, but also about game design, game engines and game development in general. Learn all you can about animation, documentation, communication, narration and of course always be passionate about what you do.

FOCUS ON THE MUSIC

4 **BASTIAN KIESLINGER** For budding game composers I'd say don't forget to play games and focus on how the music is used in the game. Try to develop a good sense of what works and what doesn't. Try to get a good intuition on how to use your music in the game and think about how it can be adaptive or interactive. Also, dig into interactive storytelling and narration in general, and always try to empathise with the player, imagine how they experience the game and how the music can extend and support their experience. In my opinion the best piece of game music is almost worthless if it plays at the wrong spot. And finally, put all your heart and soul into your work to help create some truly magical moments for the players!



BE A COMMUNITY MANAGER

WANT A JOB IN COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT? UBISOFT'S SENIOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPER **SALLY DA COSTA** HAS THE BEST ADVICE IN THE BUSINESS





PUT YOURSELF OUT THERE

Your presence within the digital space is a good measure for employers when looking for community managers. Make sure you have a strong positive footprint out there.

WHEN YOU LACK INDUSTRY / WORK EXPERIENCE

It's not always about employing experienced people when recruiting for your community team; in my opinion, it's also about looking for talent and potential that can be developed. So when you lack industry / role experience I would always encourage you to demonstrate that you have a broad set of skills that matter in the role being advertised. Take on volunteer roles within gaming communities you care about, try your hand at content creation, build your personal social following, familiarise yourself with streaming, gaming news, and research the games industry and development studios. Contribute articles, run clans, volunteer at industry events. There's a lot you can do to get involved in this space.

PLAY THE GAME

Literally play the games of the studios you apply for – you'd be surprised how many applicants don't. The more you understand the products and communities around them, the more you can offer confidently and authentically in an interview. It is pretty important, if not vital, to be a passionate gamer to be able to fully understand those that you serve.

IT'S NOT PERSONAL

Be able to separate your personal and professional self and develop your 'armour' as, when on the frontline; it will not always be hugs, unicorns and rainbows and at tough times, a good community manager can truly shine. We are all human and our communities should see us as human but to cross the line of professionalism at any time is the road to the end of your career as a community manger. How you conduct yourself reflects on your personal brand, the brand you are representing and your company's brand

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND PASSIONS

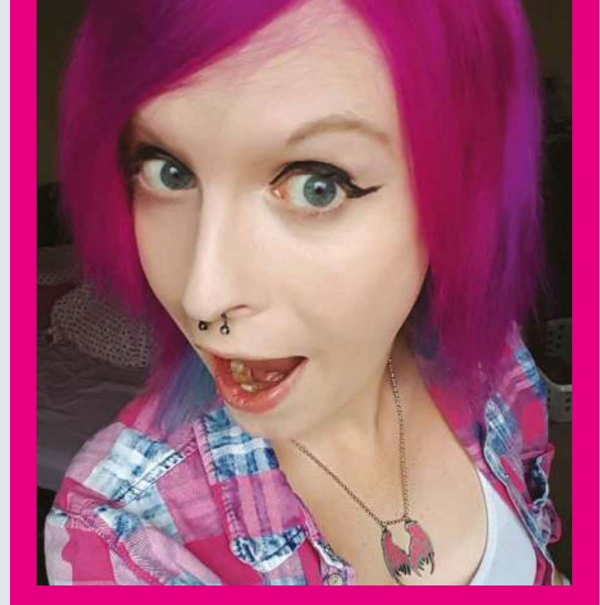
Community Management is a very broad role, which can vary massively from studio to studio. Some studios may require you to overlap with PR, creative, social, marketing, content and support elements so developing a broad set of skills will help you better adapt to the roles out there. Combining what you're good at with what you are interested in allows you to develop specialities such as Influencer Outreach, Content Creation or Behavioural Psychology. It's also important to target your weaknesses so that more roles match your skill set even if a few need to be further developed.

RESEARCH, READ AND HAVE A THIRST TO ALWAYS DEVELOP YOURSELF

These days there are plenty of great books, whitepapers and research studies all specifically around communities. There are also professional Community Management events and communities to learn from and to help establish best practices within the role. The Community Management space is constantly evolving and so should you be, no community manager has reached their 'final form' regardless how many years they have been in the role.

IF YOU WANT TO BECOME A CELEBRITY, PICK A DIFFERENT CAREER

As much as establishing an online persona and developing your personal brand may be important the community you serve should never revolve around you. It's all about the members of your communities along with the brand and company you represent and you should never lose sight of that.



BECOME AN I.T. INFRASTRUCTURE ENGINEER

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY'S **JESSICA COATES** DETAILS THIS INTEGRAL STUDIO SUPPORT ROLE

What does an IT Infrastructure Engineer do at a game studio?

My role involves working in a small team looking after the backend server infrastructure, which allows the developers to concentrate on making the games! It's a very rewarding job working with lots of talented and creative people who all share the same passion. It also lets me work with some high-end technology, which until now I haven't had a chance to experience. Using my previous obtained livestream knowledge I also assisted in overhauling the studio's livestream output and assisting our parent company, Sega, with various productions at gaming events.

What experience did you have before getting this job?

I started working in IT around ten years ago… it was during this time I explored my passion for games further – I had always played various titles since a young age and even tried my hand at running LAN parties when I was a student. This led me to discovering the world of YouTube and Twitch alongside various gaming conventions around the UK, which I would spend all of my holiday days from work attending. I joined several *Minecraft* communities who were doing great things with the game; initially FyreUK and, later, the Noxcrew where I had the opportunity to use my livestream knowledge to help bring their successful Gameshow from YouTube to a live format on Twitch.

What tips would you give someone wanting to take on a position like yours in the future?

I would advise people to try to get as much experience as possible in IT, it's likely you will have to start at the bottom and work your way up in a non-gaming related field however you may also get the chance to join one of the internships that games companies are now offering. The main thing is to stick at it and the more you learn the more likely you are to land that dream job one day. I did this via renting a private server from one of the low cost cloud companies and setting up technologies I had heard of but never worked with, just to get experience on these technologies in an environment that didn't matter if I misconfigured or broke the tech. I would also advise that it's always a good idea to have a passion for gaming, even if just a small one as you may not enjoy the job as much as you think you will if you don't get on with the culture of the industry.

GET A ROLE AS PRODUCT MANAGER

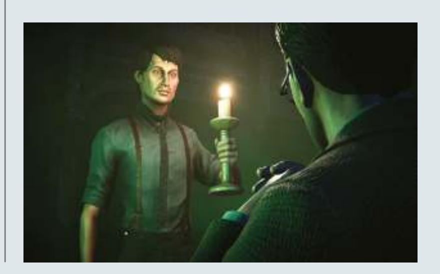
MARTIN KREUCH OF THQ NORDIC OFFERS QUICK FIRE TIPS ON PRODUCT MANAGEMENT ROLES

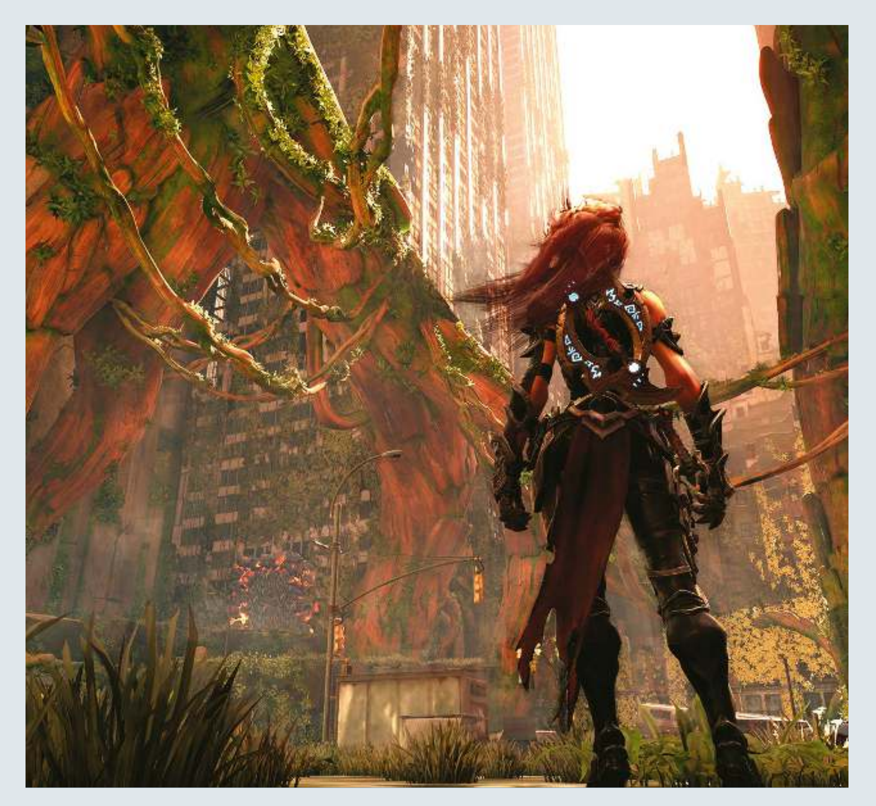


What is the role?
My role consists of quality and time management of my respective main project, as well as minor tasks on other THQ Nordic games. The day to day tasks change a lot depending on what the stage the game is in (e.g. pre-production vs. main production), but in general they include checking on the progress of the game and giving feedback to the developers from a player perspective, as well as making sure the developers have everything they need from external sources (testing, translation, etc) that they need to progress. In addition to that, as a producer, you act as a connector between the game developer and several of our internal departments like marketing, sales and more.

What does it take to get into the industry?
I'd say no matter whether you want to work at a publisher or developer, it's good to try and get a broad overview over the games industry, and not just look into the development side of things. Games are a complex product with a unique combination of different forms of art and technology. On top of that there are, like in any industry, a lot of basic realities of production, distribution and marketing that also play a big part in the planning and execution of a game.

Do your homework then?
Knowing as much as you can about those "unsexy" areas of game development will make you stand out. From a personal point of view, I feel that if you have worked in other industries, it helps you get a different viewpoint on the game's industry and on games.





BE A GAMES JOURNALIST

GAMES™ AND PLAY DIGITAL DEPUTY EDITOR **JOSH WEST** ON HOW YOU CAN STEAL HIS JOB RIGHT OUT FROM UNDER HIM



So, you want to become a games journalist? It makes sense; we are, after all, basically the rock stars of the games industry – travelling around the world to attend press events, seeing the hottest new games before anybody else, we speak to the masters behind the pixels and polygons, and we get to review the latest and greatest titles in our underwear.

Okay, only some of that is true (they make us wear trousers in the office). Look, being a games journalist is a whole lot of fun – it's rewarding and creatively challenging every single day – but it's also a whole lot of work. It's a competitive field, and only the most dedicated and perseverant will find consistent work; it requires a thick skin, some people on the Internet do *not* care about your feelings or opinions; it's life insensitive, you can expect to work long hours for little compensation; and, yes, it really sucks when a game you were really looking forward to ends up being totally bogus. Sorry to stomp all over your dreams… wait, *what*? You're still interested? Okay then; now we're talking! Here are three tips that you should look to follow if you want to kickstart your career as a games journalist.

YOU DON'T NEED A DEGREE

1 "You don't need a university education to become a games journalist. Studying journalism, English literature, English language, or any other related variation can certainly help refine your talent and improve your skills, but commissioning editors aren't going to be picky if you can demonstrate a clear mastery over the written word, convey a unique voice through your work, and offer a unique angle or killer access to a well covered subject. Focus on the basics of the craft – and for the love of god, get yourself a copy of *The Elements Of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and, E. B. White."

START YOUR OWN SITE

2 "Honestly, start your own site and start working out your writing style and voice. It doesn't matter if it doesn't get a great deal of traffic to begin with; writing reviews, previews, news and features to a strict word count (and deadline!) can help you work out where your talents are and identify problematic areas in your work that you need to develop. It's wise to experiment with your writing to work out where your strengths lie before hassling editors for work. Oh, and get others to look over the work you *do* publish – it's tough to have others be critical of your work, but you should always treat it as an opportunity to grow."

PLAY WITH STRUCTURE

3 "Outside of writing news stories, most games writing is relatively long form. But there is no better way of refining your writing style than trying to disseminate your thoughts and feelings into impossibly tight word counts. Try writing objective reviews in 80-120 words, the small space will push you to cut unnecessary language and get to the point. Keep an eye on your sentence structure, it's good to mix things up from time to time. And your first line – this one is so important – make sure the first line of any piece that you write is powerful, evocative and informative. If a reader isn't interested after the first line, they probably aren't going to read the rest of the article."



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Sam Troch via Facebook

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88 **L.A. Noire**
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89 **Reigns: Her Majesty**
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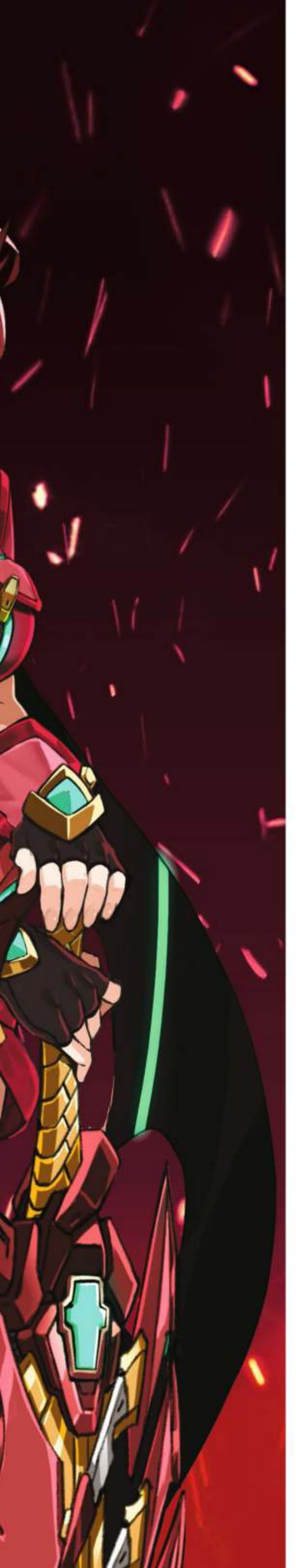
90 **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim**
Switch



82

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES 2

Monolith Soft brings its epic RPG series to the Switch, but can it stand up to the mighty releases we've already enjoyed on Nintendo's console?



THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and, of course, ten Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10 Simple The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable Again, simple Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest We'd never let that happen, and besides, you'd smell it a mile off Finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact They are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists designed to enlighten, inform and engage – the gospel according to **games™**.













AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?

Let us know through the following channels:


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A CLASSIC PORTABLE ADVENTURE

Xenoblade Chronicles 2

When looking at the scope and scale of the world in *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*, it's almost impossible to think that the game is limited in any sense of the word. However, while developer Monolith Soft is a veteran of the Japanese RPG genre, that doesn't mean that *Xenoblade 2* is without faults. The game is entrenched in traditional JRPG design, and while that may be a good thing for some expectant fans, it could turn off many newcomers to the series.

The world of *Xenoblade Chronicles 2* is vast, and takes place in an ailing land where continents have fallen and all of existence lives upon the backs of "Titans", huge creatures who are able to traverse the abyssal Cloud Seas. With countries and ships built around these gargantuan Titans, you're able to travel and explore the enormity of every one of the different Titans, and explore everything from deserted wastelands to the insides of a Titan, all the while discovering new monsters and creatures along the way.

While exploring the world of *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*, it becomes clear that the game is one of the rare titles where the world isn't crafted for player benefit, which it to say that it feels that systems are not built around player presence or agency. In the starting areas of *Xenoblade*, it's possible to run into impossibly strong creatures and get crushed immediately. There's a living, breathing world for you to explore, one that's not just crafted because the player is there, but one that exists in spite of the player being there. Just make sure to not wander into a powerful monster's territory.

For all the success of the world building in *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*, its story and characters aren't quite as laudable. You play as Rex, a plucky, young hero that is inexperienced and meets a fate much grander than his birth. Rex crosses paths with Pyra, an "Aegis" - who is obviously destined to save the world once they get to the world tree at the centre of the Cloud Sea. You pick up and meet a huge number of characters

DETAILS

FORMAT: Switch
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Monolith Soft
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A





Above: Selecting the right team of blades is essential! Here, we've got Rex equipped with three different attackers of separate elements.



THERE'S A LIVING, BREATHING WORLD FOR YOU TO EXPLORE, ONE THAT'S NOT CRAFTED BECAUSE THE PLAYER IS THERE, BUT ONE THAT EXISTS DESPITE YOU BEING THERE



FAQs

Q. IS THE GAME APPROACHABLE?
Xenoblade Chronicles 2 is difficult to get into, understanding the systems can be overwhelming.

Q. IS THIS A GOOD FIRST JRPG?
With classic JRPG tropes, it's well worth the initial struggle, if you're looking for something new.

Q. DOES THE GAME LOSE STEAM?
After around 25 hours in, there is a considerable slowdown in pace, to its detriment.

Below: About those Anime tropes… Yup. That's a giant robot maid. We're not making it up.



MECHANICAL HARMONY

Every moment in *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*'s battle system is tied to your equipped Blades, so picking the right teams for the right characters is crucial when it comes to the game's more difficult fights. Linking together Arts feels more like a rhythm game than JRPG battle system, and performing a Chain Combo at the end of battle further extends your damage output, dependant on enemy weaknesses and Blade skills. Using one of these at the end of a battle also multiplies your EXP gains by multiple factors, so being able to save a chain attack for the last moments of a battle to reap the rewards is just as crucial as getting to the end of the battle itself.

Below: If there's one thing that's not too great about *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*, it has to be the dialogue.







along the way, but none of them seem to have any substance beyond being anime tropes, even when 50-plus hours into the game.

The anime tropes don't stop there. The character designs are beyond egregious at many points in the game, and fanservice is rife. The Nintendo Switch may be portable, but you wouldn't want to be caught playing *Xenoblade Chronicles 2* out on the bus. The main story of the game gets better as time goes on, but the sluggish start often makes it feel like the opening hours are just there for the player to get used to *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*'s huge amount of systems.

When exploring, there are a wealth of activities and quests to partake in, meaning that you don't just have to be going through the story to experience the depth of the game's world. You're able to pick up quests from people and notice-boards, all of which can consist from gathering ingredients to make a cake, to defeating unique monsters to help some villagers. This improves the mastery of the continent that you happen to be on, which can enable you to buy new items from shops and more. These never feel like a chore, and are a great compliment to experiencing the world of *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*.

MISSING LINK
WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

BETTER MAPS: Just let us open up and zoom in on the map! Please! It's 2018!

Where it all gets a little bit more complex is within the battle systems of the game. Each character is equipped with three "Blade" slots, which you're able to Switch out and customise. Each Blade has a different role, Attacker, Tank or Healer, which is also complimented by an element. The real-time fights in the game have you exploiting enemy's elemental weaknesses while also rolling with a team balanced out to suit the needs of your battle. You're able to perform special attacks once you've chained together your three skills, which is all rhythm based upon the game's auto-attacking mechanics. If you follow up your elemental special, you can execute a chain of elements to do massive damage.

The battle system can be a lot to take in, but once mastered, the dynamics of the system all harmonise at once for an engaging battle system that feels equally rewarding as it is complex. This could be a turnoff to many new players, but once we'd found our groove, it was hard to put down entirely. Battles all have a rhythm, and never once feel insignificant or drawn out, you're kept on your toes at all times and it never stops feeling great to use.

It's not all fun during certain battles and in certain areas in *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*, however. In docked mode, there can be occasional significant slowdown while exploring towns or in dense areas with lots of effects. The same can be said of the Portable mode, which runs at a much lower resolution and just plain doesn't look good.

While playing *Xenoblade Chronicles 2*, there are echoes of Monolith Soft's other titles. The gargantuan Titans, and Cloud Seas remind us of *Baten Kaitos*, while the deep mechanics and battle systems are refined versions of those seen in *Xenoblade Chronicles* and *Xenoblade Chronicles X*. It feels like the developer has come to an apex of open-world design, and while the game makes some missteps along the way in its story and characterisation, it all makes up for it in the exploration of the world.


VERDICT 8/10
CLOSE TO GREATNESS

A TALE OF TWO GENRES

SpellForce 3

Bear with us, will you? Immediately blasting you with terms like "Mage Wars" and "Convocation" or obtusely fantastical names like "Eo", "Nortander" and "Aonir" isn't going to ease anyone but the previously initiated into what *SpellForce 3* has to offer, even if that is the method the game itself chooses. Frankly, it just suffers from tryhard Tolkien syndrome, and while this is an affliction that is unfairly impacted by the regularity with which gamers are forced to wrap their tongues around names with apostrophes and relearn which racial stereotype is warring against which, more could have been done to emphasise the merits of the lore here. It is a prequel, for example, set before the events of the previous games, but you wouldn't really gain much value for knowing that. It's a tale well told and has decent enough voice acting to string things along, but it's all a little on the nose, as though the tropes of fantasy are so ironclad by now that no other suit of armour will fit. Yet the point is that in spite of all this (let's face it, it's not a new challenge to struggle through) there's a good deal worth getting into. The pacing, for example, offers a more plodding approach that is controlled as much by player exploration as the need to control the flow of combat. And that's important, because one thing you should know about *SpellForce 3* – that is if you don't already – is that it is actually a hybrid between an RTS and an RPG, and, as a result, there are quite a few systems to figure out.

For those who have played the previous games the concept won't be much different, but this time around the blend between the two modes is far less distinct. There's no clearly defined moments where you're playing an RTS or an RPG as was the case previously, which makes for much more fluid gameplay. You'll control a group of heroes, some unique to the story and others custom created. Much like the majority of

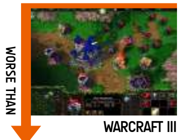
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: THQ Nordic
DEVELOPER: Grimlore Games
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-6
MINIMUM SPEC: 64-bit OS, Intel Core i5, 6GB RAM, 2GB GPU, 15GB disk space
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN

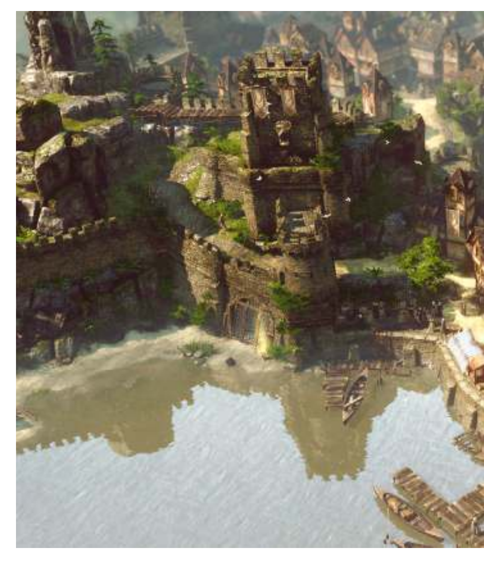
SPELLFORCE 2





WARCRAFT III

WORSE THAN



Above: The visuals really are quite impressive, especially the large-scale cities that you explore.

Below: For as good looking as the game is, it can be a little frustrating to tell units apart in the battlefield. A handy glow appears around the hero characters, though, making them a little easier to spot.

SPELLFORCE 3 MAY SEEM WEAKER THAN ANY OF ITS COMPARISONS, BUT IT IS INSTEAD ALL ITS OWN THING



FAQs

Q. LENGTH?
It's advertised at 30 hours, and that's likely achievable if you go all in on the exploration.

Q. REPLAYABILITY?
Admittedly it's limited in this regard, once the main campaign is done there's not much call to play through again.

Q. MULTIPLAYER?
Skirmishes include merchants and monster spawns to speed things along, but it might be a bit too plodding for a multiplayer community to thrive.

Below: There's a good amount of variety in the locales, but little changes as a result.



MY SWORD, MY BOW, MY AXE

The humans, the elves and the orcs; a tale as old as time. Each of the three playable factions have their own distinct characters and some minor aspects that differ them in certain ways. The orcs, for example, are more brutish, the elves favour evasion and ranged attacks while the humans are the all-rounders. If that wasn't cliched enough – and really this can be forgiven – it might've been nice if there was some greater distinction between the three, giving players the option for a favourite but also separating them in the lore of the game. The buildings, for example, all function and work pretty much the same – and that seems like a missed opportunity.

Below: The stronger emphasis on story and campaign scripting means there are a good few moments that, while not exactly scripted, lead to some pretty cool situations.

RTS games since *WarCraft III*, these heroes are the main crutch of your force and will, in fact, be the ones that you'll want to focus on protecting. Each can have three abilities available at any one time, items to be equipped to enhance their function and their own benefit within the group. They're easy to make use of – even later in the game when there are more of them available – though admittedly things are made easier thanks to a handy wheel menu that slows down time as commands are selected. At times it might feel like the option to completely pause the game would've been appreciated, but then perhaps that would have made things a little too easy when the stakes are higher. Yet while it's hard to say that these special hero characters are overpowered (this isn't true since there are significant threats that will need some careful management), once you've got a combination set in stone you won't find much reason to stray from that.

While Grimlore Games has said it's trying to skew the ratio of RTS to RPG more in favour of the latter – thus the greater emphasis on storytelling and combat – it has inadvertently weakened the former. Basic rank-and-file units can be killed with very little effort on both sides of the battle, and so their purchase seems worth little more than cannon fodder. The construction side of things works pretty well, expanding over time and working essentially autonomously to ensure a steady stream of resources coming in. Watchtowers can be built, too, so there's no need to sit around blocking off routes with a stack of units that could be better utilised elsewhere. In taking inspiration from *Company Of Heroes* and its regional system – whereby a command point needs to be under your control to ensure an income of resources – *SpellForce 3* manages to tread that line between defence and offence deftly.

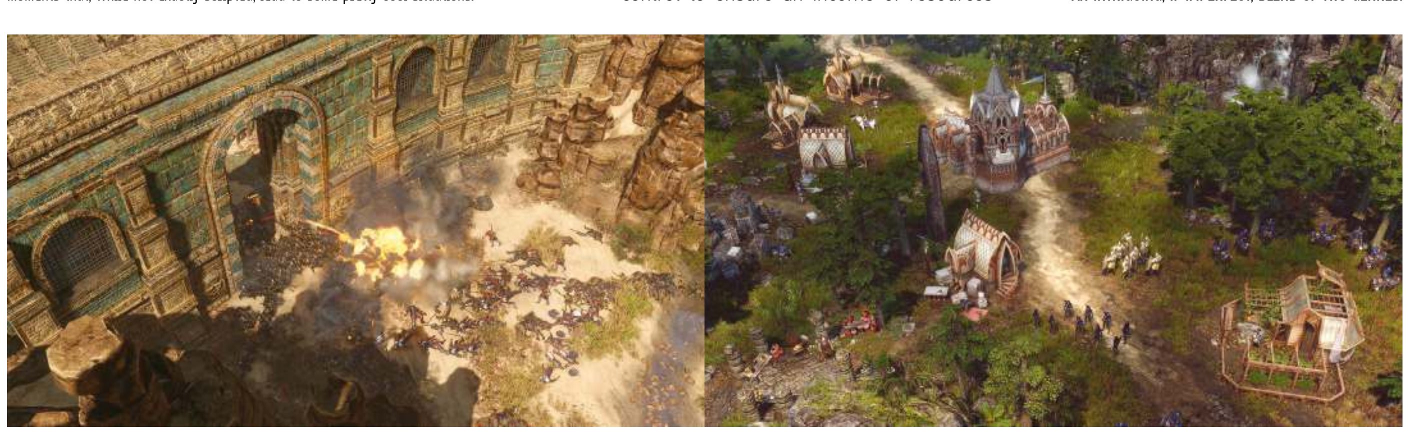
What is most interesting is how there's a much more open world here, an overworld map that can be explored at will and even returned to. With bases set up throughout, it really does feel as though you're expanding an army rather than organising a battle. With quests and intensely levelled monsters to overcome, it's likely that you'll end up heading back and forth between areas over time. That's something that no RTS, even hybrids like this, has ever done. Typically, each new base is in itself a new base, and rarely will you ever return once you've moved on. Admittedly there are quite lengthy load times between these, but it's a novel idea that we'd like to see expanded on more in the future. It has a feeling of *Dragon Age: Inquisition* in this regard, albeit with a heavier focus on the RTS aspects. *SpellForce 3* combines to create something that is really quite engrossing once all of its intricacies have settled on the brain. Combat doesn't match the depth of an RPG like *Baldur's Gate*, while its RTS fare isn't capable of standing up to any of the modern-day equivalents. What is clear is that *SpellForce 3* isn't trying to be like any one thing; while it takes its cues from the likes of Dragon Age and Age Of Empires, it isn't trying to crowbar the two different gameplay types together inelegantly. There is still strategy in its economy management, there are still things to consider while battling and while on the surface it may seem weaker than any of its comparisons, it is instead all its own thing.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

PLANS APPROVED: The base construction and economic systems work well, but in trying to feed both RTS and RPG combat elements it has lost some of its depth. Really emboldening its need for higher ground, ambushes or flanking might give more strategy to the weaker RTS side of the game.

VERDICT 7/10
AN INTRIGUING, IF IMPERFECT, BLEND OF TWO GENRES.



TRY NOT TO GO APE

Planet Of The Apes: Last Frontier



There's no denying the technical brilliance behind the rebooted Planet Of The Apes movies, and with The Imaginarium – the company that provided the motion capture technology for the films – on board, *Last Frontier* is just as committed to eye-popping visual fidelity as its source material.

To describe this stunning virtual spin-off as a game isn't entirely accurate, your limited input makes the term 'interactive movie' a more fitting description. Player participation rarely extends beyond flicking the thumbstick left or right to commit to a choice, and when it does, it merely involves a single button press that allows your character to perform situation-specific activities during action sequences. Outside of that, *Last Frontier* is simply one long cutscene.

The action takes place between the second and third films, but intricate knowledge of their events is unnecessary as this tells its own story involving a breakaway band of apes struggling for survival in the Rocky Mountains. Revelling in the same moral ambiguity as its silver screen counterpart, the narrative concerns the uneasy interaction between these intelligent primates and a small group of humans who are desperate to preserve their dwindling race. You witness the events and make choices on both sides of the conflict, the awareness that neither side is entirely righteous or corrupt adds layers to the delicious decision-making complexity.

Complex, that is, until you realise that you're essentially guided down the same path regardless of what choices you make, with the only impactful decisions occurring towards the end of the game. Take a stance that goes against where the narrative wants to go and you'll routinely be overruled, either by another character or simply the game itself, leading to the same situation regardless of your choices. For instance, decide against ape hunting in favour of focusing on protecting the town and you'll be outvoted, or choose not to toss a rock at a fleeing human and you'll tackle him anyway, exposing your so-called freedom as little more than a veiled illusion.

It also constantly funnels you down the path towards peace between the two sides, effectively making you go out of your way to witness anything outside of an idyllic conclusion. Unlike in a Telltale game, there are no surprises or red herrings here; every choice is surprisingly shallow, unfolding without any unanticipated developments or outcomes.

While the story is well presented, *Last Frontier* lacks the exquisite emotional impact of the movies and fails to add anything overly significant or worthwhile to the franchise. Having the means to sway events, form allegiances or advance factions in such a morally grey setting is an exciting endeavour, but when the layers are peeled back, the limited scope of its execution becomes starkly apparent and ultimately makes this a disappointing case of style over substance.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: The Imaginarium
DEVELOPER: The Imaginati Studios
PRICE: £15.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: 1-4

BETTER THAN
NIGHT TRAP: 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION





WORSE THAN
THE WALKING DEAD: A NEW FRONTIER



VERDICT 5/10
YOU'RE BETTER OFF JUST WATCHING THE MOVIES.









Above: Players take control of the ape Bryn. As the middle child of the tribe's leader, he struggles between adhering to his father's demands to keep the tribe safe, and following his reckless older brother who's set on dominance over the humans.


The fallen stars cluster around you and are pretty much the key to your power. Push them away to collect more and trigger green monsters, or keep them around you to move slower and with more purpose.

MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

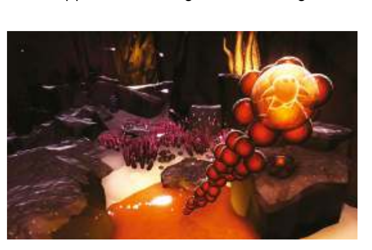
Ode

Ode should be pitched as the game with the best butt. This game is mainly about the evolution of sound and music, but for the first few moments it's really about a great derrière. You play as a chubby, humanoid blob nestled inside a clear ball. Gameplay merely asks you to roll around at first, exploring your neon environs. As you bounce from rock to rock, you'll start collecting glowing fallen stars and begin to build a large, rotating mass around you as you roll around in the glorious, alien landscape. Each paradisiacal level is a mad mixture of glittering auras, fluorescent waters, bright flora and strange, bulbous creatures that demand to be fed.

But the real appeal of *Ode* is in the listening. As you move you'll notice that when you roll over a rock it'll emit a light drum tap, while over there a stretch of sand ripples like the gentle stroking of an xylophone. The more you explore, the more fallen stars you collect, the more the music swells and builds around you. The world is full of humming, whistling, beats and boops that all weave together into an electronic masterpiece. But it's you that's conducting it all. As you start amassing the falling stars – which either trail behind you, helping to create your symphony, or can be thrown out to collect more from hard-to-reach places – the noise builds and gathers in more sounds from the landscape.

The fallen stars aren't just members of your orchestra though, they're there to feed the green lumps hungry for ethereal mass. You need to feed all the smaller green lumps with stars until the biggest green lump turns gold and fills the air with even more music. All those tinklings and trumpetings start to make sense as more green blobs turn gold. It's just a shame that there are only four levels to explore – plus one particularly delightful Christmas-themed time trial. Discovering the water-based system of skills is wonderful, giving your cluster of stars the ability to transform into a speeding wheel or give you extra bounce for example. But as soon as you start getting into the rhythms of *Ode* and mastering its liquid control scheme, it's all over.

Thankfully, exploring each level is more of a gentle meander than a race to the finish – in fact, you really won't want each one to end. It's another genius game from the Ubisoft Reflections team though, aka the brains behind *Grow Home* and *Atomega*. It's becoming a studio known for creating games that feel like lucid dreams, in the very best ways. It's not quite what this is an ode to aside from music, light and a really great arse, but it's certainly an ode to joy to play.

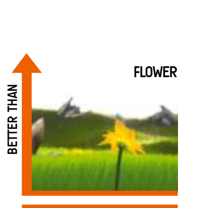




DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: United Kingdom
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Reflections
PRICE: £4.49
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows 7+ (64bit versions only), Intel Core i5 2400s, AMD FX 6100, 4GB RAM, Nvidia GeForce GTX 660, AMD Radeon HD 7870
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

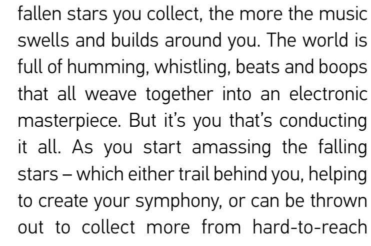

FLOWER

WORSE THAN


GNOG







FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GROWTH: Unlike similar games like *Flower*, the gradual transformation of your character really sets this game apart. As the music evolves, so does your cherub-esque character, and it's all done with zero hand-holding or explanation.



VERDICT 8/10

A WONDERFULLY EXECUTED MUSICAL MASTERPIECE.



The open world is conspicuously empty. Every two seconds, a car horn sounds, yet the streets are bare. There is never traffic in LA Noire's weirdly quiet Los Angeles. Who is beeping? Where is everyone? Why is it so dull?

GOOD COP, BAD COP, OLD COP

L.A. Noire

***L.A. Noire* on Switch is an attempt to teach an old dog new tricks.** It's the video game equivalent of Steve Buscemi's "how do you do, fellow kids" - and without most of the new additions specifically for Nintendo Switch, perhaps it would have been just fine.

A few little tweaks here and there are relatively welcome, of course. In interrogations, the choices were previously "Truth, Doubt, Lie" - and they rarely corresponded to the actor's following dialogue, often resulting in Detective Cole Phelps yelling at children and innocent witnesses just because they looked a bit shifty. In the Switch version, the options have been changed to, respectively, "Good Cop, Bad Cop, Accuse", which more closely follows Cole's reaction, albeit with an implication that you can swing between moods like Tarzan on vines.

L.A. Noire is still an impressively well-themed game, with noir practically spilling out of its stylish fedora hats. Incomprehensible '40s slang gets sprinkled in like pepper, and cases inspired by real life nicely centre the world in historical fact.

However, the pacing is strange, and cases and conversations are often over much too soon, as if they're being rushed through like a toddler telling a story. Worse yet, the game wavers between treating you like an absolute moron with unskippable tutorials, and then telling you that you've been promoted for the fifth time in two days for being The World's Best Detective.

The facial animation – something that *L.A. Noire* was well known for six years ago – stands up remarkably well, neatly sidestepping the uncanny valley of dead-eyed automata that even the highest budget games can't avoid. It's wasted on the "tells", though - the weird shifty faces characters make when they're lying - because every single one looks like a constipation face, and none are subtle.

But if you've played *L.A. Noire* before, none of that is news to you. The new additions to the game are probably what you want to hear about instead - and it's not good news.

L.A. Noire can't help but constantly remind you of all the Switch features it has shoehorned into its re-release. From the controls tutorial in the menu, which tells you all about touchscreen and motion controls but not actually about how to use the buttons, to the incessant use of HD Rumble whenever you jump a fence, discover a clue, or fart gently into the wind, it feels like you're being beaten over the head with New Features. It's unnecessary, and pulls you right out of the game - besides, who on earth wants to play *L.A. Noire* on a touchscreen? And who can remember the ten thousand gesture controls for the Joy-Cons? Who even wants to?

L.A. Noire is an easy seven-point-five out of ten on any day - but its insistence on using every bell and whistle the Nintendo Switch has to offer makes it a pain to play. Features should add to entertainment, not diminish it. *L.A. Noire* didn't quite strike that balance.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Switch
OTHER FORMATS: PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: in-house
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

PLAYING THE ROLE: The Good Cop/Bad Cop dynamic is much better than Truth/Doubt was in the original game. Not perfect, mind you - but much better, and much easier to understand.



UNNECESSARY ADDITIONS ARE IRRITATING

IT'S NOT EASY BEING QUEEN

Reigns: Her Majesty

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Android, iOS
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Nerial, Synaptic Insight Technology Systems
DEVELOPER: Devolver Digital
PRICE: £2.79
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows 7, Intel Core2 Duo T5600 (2 * 1830), 1 GB RAM memory, GeForce Go 7600 (128 MB), 150 MB storage space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Ruling a kingdom isn't easy. But in a game where there are 26 deaths to collect, chances of intriguing encounters each time you gasp out your last breath, and different events for every single round, wise governance is pretty much optional.

This isn't just a case of flicking cards left and right with the reckless abandon of Tinder. Sure, you have to choose with the same caution whether to blow off your coronation party or greet a visiting King and his Queen with cloying cordiality, but there's a twist: before each new life starts, you're faced with a horoscope clock. Every queen has her own star sign, which in truly cosmic fashion determines what kind of cards you'll run into. More war, better chance at romance, that kind of thing. You know they're special by the small symbol in the corner, so every time you run into one there's an exhilarating chance to make this rare encounter count. Such a simple addition makes each queen feel like she's actually juggling wildly different politics from her predecessor.

You soon figure out which star sign you'll need to rule in to complete certain milestones, but the title cards at the beginning of each reign sure help too. Short and snappy (hopefully not like your neck at the end of your monarchy), they set the stage for how your previous queen left the country and what new challenges her heir faces. So, rather cannily, if you rule flippantly you'll have a devil of a time in your next life. Speaking of lives, there are wickedly clever appearances from the ominous All-Mother and infuriating duel master to keep you on your toes. The former delivers threatening prophecies, and the other spouts empowering statistics with mechanical fervour, or invites you to share its bogus feminist percentile results. By god, it's funny.

And as with most games, there are issues. Objects given to you by characters are stored at the bottom of the screen, ready to be used – although it's not entirely obvious when that should be. Sometimes a character will straight-up ask for one, yet mostly you're left to guess when would be wise to chuck a USB stick of your results in someone's face or challenge them to a duel. Get it wrong once too often, and you'll get beheaded for such reckless abandon. So it's easy to get stuck in the same cycle of affairs (the dull kind, although you can romance characters) without much clue as to which object thrown at which card would get you out of your rut.

Improving upon the original game in almost every way, *Reigns: Her Majesty* is deviously fun, dangerously addictive, and has a sense of humour way better than any court jester.

VERDICT 8/10
FUN MONARCHY SIMULATOR THAT'S ALMOST TOO WITTY

ENHANCED



IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

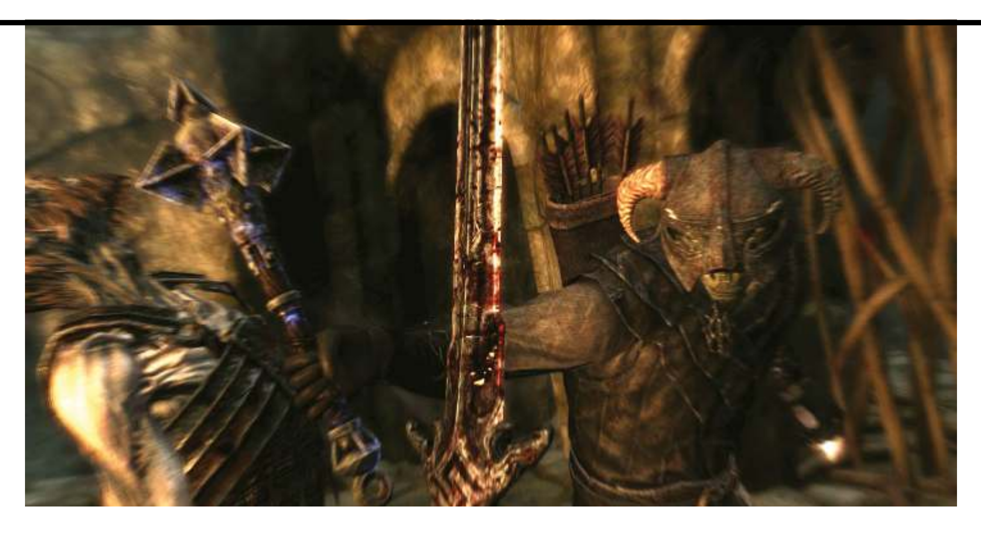
USABLE ITEMS: Unlock certain objects from characters, and you can then use them later on to complete milestones – just be careful about throwing them out aimlessly, or you'll end up dead in no time.

Above: No one said being Queen was easy, and sometimes there's just no winning against the stupidity of your court… and kingdom.





Above: Watch out for the All-Mother: is she friend or foe? Different characters will tell you what to think, but be careful…



ANOTHER BETHESDA RE-RELEASE FOR SWITCH, AND ANOTHER GREAT FIT

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

It is 2018. You likely already know what you think of Bethesda's mega-selling RPG *Skyrim*. It's a game that had a genuine bit of crossover success, leaving a bit of a mark in the overall public pop culture space, which is more than most ever manage. You already know if you're into it's endless fetch quests, functional-at-best combat and often hilarious but at times powerfully frustrating bugs. You're already aware of the main quest, a fairly by the numbers 'chosen one' tale set in against a classic – or generic, if you're really putting the boot in – fantasy backdrop, dungeons and dragons all present and correct. *Skyrim* on the Switch isn't going to surprise anyone outside of the mere fact that it exists.

It doesn't fix any of *Skyrim*'s problems, but what it does do on Nintendo's wonderful handheld hybrid is accentuate the stuff that *Skyrim* does well. It really is a stunning place to visit – a world that is there purely for you to head out into a see what you can find. A five minute trek off the beaten path can lead to countless hours of adventure and at no point do you ever find yourself in a position where you can't just hit that sleep button and walk away. Change train, begin your walk home, finish your lunch break. Whatever. It sounds weird, praising a game on the same system as *Breath Of The Wild* or *Xenoblade Chronicles 2* for having a less than engaging core but surprisingly – for an RPG hundreds of hours long – to be so pick up and play.

If you're at home, you can dig into being the 'Dragonborn' in the main quest (this version comes with all the DLC content) or start shaping your character with the versatile levelling system, but if you're in a position where you can't afford to get stuck with something, you can just dive headfirst into the nearest cave and see what treasures you can find, or start ticking off some of the many side quests you'll have in your log. Or even just see what's over the top of that next hill. It all rolls back into the main gameplay loop - explore, improve, finish quests and get new stuff to play with, be that a fancy sword or a powerful spell.

Skyrim may still be something of a flawed classic, but the Elder Scrolls games have always been stunning worlds to get lost in for a few hours. It's amazing that *Skyrim* lends itself to such bite-sized chunks, and even more incredible that it now fits in your pocket.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Switch
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox 360, Xbox One, PS3, PS4, PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Zenimax
DEVELOPER: Bethesda
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION



WORSE THAN



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

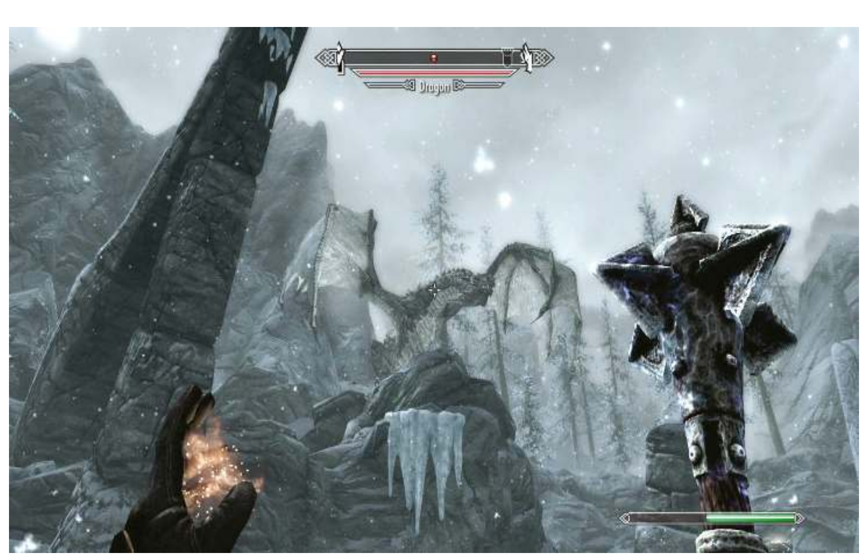
ENHANCED

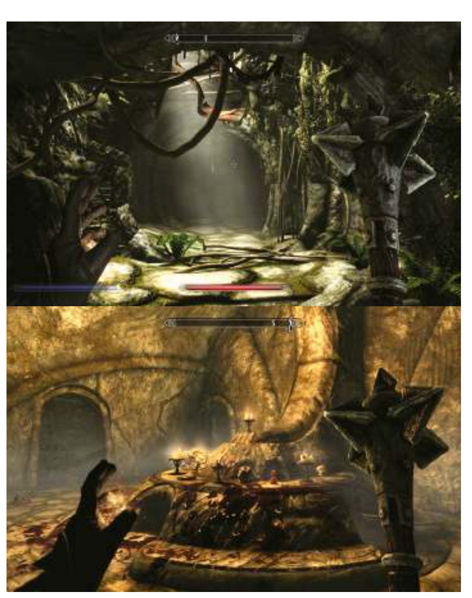
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

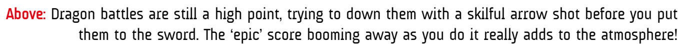
NINTENDO POWER: In this port, you can scan an amiibo to gain a daily drop of a treasure chest, Link's armour from *Breath Of The Wild*, as well as the Master Sword and Hylian Shield.

VERDICT 8/10

IT'S *SKYRIM*, WARTS AND ALL, IN YOUR POCKET.







Above: Dragon battles are still a high point, trying to down them with a skilful arrow shot before you put them to the sword. The 'epic' score booming away as you do it really adds to the atmosphere!



"It feels like it was disowned by the industry. But I loved it"

CHRISTOPHER PAYTON, HEAD OF ART, REBELLION

WHY I ❤...

CLOSE COMBAT

CHRISTOPHER PAYTON
HEAD OF ART, REBELLION

"The game I love that immediately springs to mind is Close Combat. It's a series of RTS games primarily released between 1996 and 2000. They did the invasion of Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge, I think they did Stalingrad too… and it was just really lovely. The detail was fantastic, the artwork was gorgeous – probably because it was 2D, and so they didn't have to do much 3D work. But it dealt with issues of the morale of the troops – explosions and shellshock, salvaging ammunition and things like that. I think it just really appealed to my geeky side, I do have a love for WW2. I always did anyway.

It's a really geeky game; one level can take more than twenty minutes to play, it's a real slow burn. I don't know how, but somehow I just got addicted to it. Every time a new one would come out I'd buy it, and I feel really bad because eventually it got sold off to Mattel Interactive (what on earth are they doing with it?) and I don't even know who owns it now, it feels like it was disowned by the industry. But I loved it."


Move
Out
Defend
Pull
Back
End
Battle
Force
Morale
Anti-Pers:
Anti-Tank:
2 4 8 16 32 64
Mobility
AA MG
Gunner
Healthy
Stable
Rested
AA .50 cal
AP
667
Driver
Healthy
Stable
Rested
- - -
- - -
??
0
M4A1
Fired at Wood Building and missed.
M4A1
Redeploying successful.
M4A1
Fired at Stone Building and hit area.
M4A1
AT team attack!
M4A1
Fired at Wood Building and hit area.

RETRO

NO.196



100

BEHIND THE SCENES…

25 YEARS OF REBELLION

We reflect with Jason Kingsley on how Rebellion started, how it made its name and how it found its place in the game publishing hierarchy

THE RETRO GUIDE TO

96 **THE RETRO GUIDE TO GAME COLLECTING**

Game collector and preservationist Justin Hickman talks us through his collection and offers tips on how you too can become a protector of gaming's great and illustrious history without breaking the bank

GAME-CHANGERS

106 **LITTLE-BIGPLANET**

In an issue dedicated to how you can do more in the world of gaming we thought it was a good time to look back at Media Molecule's ode to player creativity and how its Play, Create, Share mantra has gone on to influence the industry in all the years that have followed

DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro and much more on our dedicated forum **forum.gamestm.co.uk**



THE RETRO GUIDE TO...

HOW TO BECOME A GAME COLLECTOR

We chat with game collector and preservationist Justin Hickman to get his advice on how to take you gaming library to the next level

EVERY ISSUE WE PACK OUR RETRO SECTION FULL OF CLASSIC GAMES, MANY OF WHICH YOU MAY HAVE PLAYED OVER THE YEARS, BUT MANY MORE WE'RE SURE YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF, LET ALONE HAD IN YOUR POSSESSION. But what if you actually wanted to become a retro game collector? How would you even begin to compile a library of classic games? We thought we would take a moment to consider these questions and more with a seasoned collector to get their thoughts on how it can be done.

Justin Hickman isn't just a game collector; he also considers himself to be a game preservationist, compiling a library of titles that isn't just about possession or accumulation, but making sure working copies are available to be enjoyed and passed down in the future. Lead by, but not exclusive to, Nintendo games, Hickman's impressive collection was born of a passion for gaming from a young age. "I became a collector by proxy," he tells us. "I have always had a huge passion for the medium of video games and have had a keen interest since I was a child. Being born in the early Eighties and 'growing up' through the Nineties, I was lucky enough to live through what some would consider 'the golden age' of gaming that was 16-bit through 32-bit."

This has given Hickman a great head start as a collector as he was already a fan and owned titles like *Super Mario World*, *A Link To The Past*, *Resident Evil*, *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid*. "I was keen to hold on to as much of this as possible and, though admittedly some consoles and games were inevitably lost along the way, I was lucky enough to hold on to a large chunk of what would become my video game collection," Hickman tells us. "This carried on as the generations changed and the medium as a whole gained momentum to become what it is today. The collecting started years later when I had a little more disposable income and had nostalgia for my 'golden age' of gaming. I decided to fill in the blanks, and slowly started buying games I either lost along the way or missed out on years passed. This nostalgia-fuelled hobby quickly turned from not just the games I missed out on, but the consoles too, and this is where my story of becoming a collector begins!"

Hickman's collection now includes thousands of games and in excess of 70 consoles, but his first targets were a small collection of superior NTSC versions of classic RPGs. "Back in the Nineties there was a large gap between Europe/Australia and America/Japan, which were PAL and NTSC respectively," Hickman explains. "The gap was twofold: games came out *much* later (if at all) in PAL regions, and due to PAL TVs outputting in 576i, and video games primarily being designed for NTSC TVs in 480i, there was a problem when porting to PAL. Video games were usually 240p native, and scan lines were introduced to fill in every other line to allow the image to fill a 480i display. This is what created the scan-line look many purists still like to enjoy. While this was all well and good on NTSC 480i displays it became tricky to port over to PAL. Many more unused lines meant large borders to the top and bottom screen, plus a speed decrease of around 17.5 per cent, making many PAL games inferior to their NTSC brethren. It was in part because of these reasons I decided to go hunting for full-screen and full-speed (NTSC) games that you couldn't find easily (if at all) in UK stores. This became quite the rabbit hole, as it turned out what are considered to be some of the best games of all time (*Earthbound*, *Final Fantasy III*, *Chrono Trigger*) were at the time not available in PAL territories. And so it began; the hunt for three of the best JRPGs of all time. It was much harder in the Nineties with no eBay and no (easily) available Internet, and as such the world was a smaller place. I was reliant on mail-order ads found in the back of gaming magazines of the time (like *CVG* and *Super Play*), independent video game retailers and Computer Exchange, who had a decent (though crazy-expensive) import section."

"THAT GAME YOU'RE FINDING HARD TO RESIST WILL COME UP FOR SALE AGAIN SOON ENOUGH, TRUST ME"

Despite the obstacles of those earlier years of collecting, Hickman's toughest find was something else entirely. "That would be *Soul Blazer* PAL," he reveals. "Rarely does it come up for sale, and when it does the prices are always ridiculous. After years of casual searching, I managed to obtain one off a good friend



Parasite Eve was one of the first US exclusives that Justin Hickman managed to get a hold of for his collection. "It was a thing of beauty," he tells us.



WHAT KIND OF COLLECTOR ARE YOU?

Justin Hickman offers his description of the different kinds of game hoarders out there

THE SPECULATORS

"These are the people either buying to sell at a profit or buying to stockpile in storage, crossing their fingers hoping it becomes a nice little nest egg – which usually it doesn't (and then comes the panic sell!)."

NOSTALGIC COLLECTORS

"People fuelled by nostalgia to re-live and experience games they remember fondly from yesteryear. Condition and boxes usually not important (at least initially). They then either fall down the rabbit hole (hello!) or have their fun, sell up and move on."

THE ELITE/STATUS COLLECTORS

"They go for complete sets, super-rare and expensive games usually CIB [complete in box]."

THE PRESERVATIONIST

"People who love the medium and try to do their part in preserving the physical software and hardware that could get lost to history."

THE INSTANT COLLECTORS

"These are the guys who bypass the thrill of the hunt and enjoyment of watching their collection steadily grow while on a manageable budget and go straight for the gold. Netting full collections in months and either paying over the odds or finding themselves in debt, these are the guys who get out of the hobby almost as quickly as they get in."



HICKMAN'S HIGHLIGHTS

We asked our collector what he considered the crown jewels of his collection

SOUL BLAZER PAL

"Considered to be the rarest PAL SNES game in existence, it is the only PAL English-speaking version and was only released in Scandinavia and in limited quantities, making it a holy grail among SNES collectors. I only own the cartridge (no box and manual) but bah, who cares, I own the game! It also helps that it is a fantastic game and the first in an excellent trilogy of games known as The Quintet trilogy (*Soul Blazer, Illusion of Time/Gaia* and *Terranigma*)."

TERRANIGMA

"I mentioned previously how we missed out on many of the best RPGs on the SNES; well here is one that never even made it to the US and boy, is it superb! It's not super rare, but hands down it's an overlooked gem."

CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT

"Not especially rare but, put simply, one of the best games ever made."

CASTLEVANIA: VAMPIRE'S KISS

"I was always attracted to this one for the wrong reasons. The game is okay, but I love the artwork. It's becoming very sought after."

And the rest… *Demons Crest, Wild Guns, Hagane, The Firemen, Daze Before Christmas, Sunset Riders, Mario RPG, Chrono Trigger, Earthbound, Final Fantasy III, Lufia, Lunar, Lunar 2, Suikoden, Suikoden II, Xenogears*

and fellow collector for a very reasonable price."

Everyone has their own reasons, motivations and style of game-buying when they become a collector, and it seems clear that for Hickman it's been born out of a passion for gaming and experiencing everything his favourite consoles and genres have to offer. We thought we would try and get some insight and lessons from him that could help you out if you wanted to become a dedicated game collector, too. The first was not to rush in: "People come into the hobby, get excited and spend way too much money," he warns us. "They look at their bank account and all their new acquisitions taking up space and panic sell it off, normally in bulk. Usually at a loss, too, with a heavy lesson learned and a lighter wallet to hold." So managing money and patience is important. "Work out an affordable budget, and stick to it!" says Hickman. "That game you're finding hard to resist will come up for sale again soon enough, trust me."

Another key is getting to know about the specifics of the market you're buying games in, and checking to see what issues might exist there. As gaming becomes more and more popular, its history becomes more valuable, and unfortunately that means it's more attractive for exploitation. "Educate yourself on what you are buying," Hickman insists. "As the scene becomes more and more vibrant it gets littered with reproduction games listed as originals. If you are unsure, walk away and do your homework: go to forums, ask Google, check images of original games – always be informed before making that purchase."

It's also a good idea to set yourself some clear boundaries so you're not just trying to collect everything under the sun on a limited budget. "Set rules," Hickman says. "For example, collect for one platform or genre, [will you buy] loose carts or box-complete titles, mint condition or average? Otherwise you will quickly become overwhelmed."

Collecting by system seems to be a popular move, but we wondered what system might be the best for a new collector to start with. Hickman obviously got things started with the SNES, but it's our understanding that's a tough nut to crack on limited funds. "I have always said avoid Super Nintendo (way too expensive and competitive), and go for PlayStation. While the former is certainly still true, the latter isn't anymore," Hickman tells us. "PlayStation prices are rising year on year, with even more common games sneaking up in price. So if you're on a budget or simply want to dangle your toes in the water you could do a lot worse than PlayStation 2. There are some magnificent genre-defining games on the system and right now, for the most part, they're mostly all super cheap and relatively easy to get hold of."

> "JUST BECAUSE A GAME IS RARE OR EXPENSIVE DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN IT'S GOOD"

But is the SNES the most difficult entry point for a collector? "I can only speak from my own personal experience, and while there are more expensive and frustrating systems to collect for (Neo Geo AES anyone!?), for my money it is the Super Nintendo," says Hickman. "People now in their 30s and 40s with disposable income and who are yearning for that nostalgic hit are all over the system. This makes collecting for the SNES frustrating, competitive and *very* expensive. Coupled with the fact that the boxes are cardboard this also makes condition a mixed bag at best. There is no denying this is one of the best systems ever made, but my advice? Either collect loose carts and stick to commons or take the easy route and get a Super Nintendo Classic Mini (easy to hook up to modern TVs too)."

There may be another way around pricing and scarcity for PAL

carts though. "Consider Japanese versions of the game," Hickman suggests as another potential money-saving tip. "They are usually *much* cheaper (sometimes less than 10 per cent of the PAL equivalent!) and many have full English menus. Just be mindful of the additional required means in order to play them." There are a couple more all-important lessons to be learned, too. 'Just because a game is rare and/or expensive doesn't necessarily mean it's good," says Hickman. "Don't collect as a get-rich-quick scheme. This is a myth and many (read most) games depreciate with time. There are also much more viable ways of gaining a solid ROI [return on investment]."

Which really only leaves the question of where to go to find good deals and bargains. As stated before, the market has evolved a fair amount over the years. Where once you would have been confined to specialist retailers and car boot sales, now you have a sea of online storefronts you can browse, but are there any spots that are better than others, we wondered? "Sadly there are no secrets here," Hickman tells us. "It's the usual car boots, online auction sites, independent game stores, charity shops and word of mouth. You would be surprised how many people offer you video games when they know you have an interest. One person's rubbish is another one's treasure! But hey, that's the fun of the hobby – the hunt. Be tenacious and you will be successful, just not overnight!"

So there you have it, some tips on how to become a collector from someone who has amassed a fantastic collection and is preserving a large piece of gaming history. It's not been without its pitfalls and challenges – "My games room was flooded a few years back wiping out around 10 per cent of my collection," Hickman revealed to us – but it can be deeply rewarding and fun to build a collection, especially if you can find your passion for it. "Collecting retro video games is fun, exciting and rewarding," summarises Hickman. "Be patient, be disciplined, be frugal and, most importantly, be happy!"



■ As you can see, Hickman has a few bits of merchandise in amongst the rest of his games collection, which can be its own direction to head in. "I have some figurines, soundtracks and magazines," he tells us, "but my primary focus has always been software."

25 YEARS OF REBELLION

Rebellion Developments is celebrating a milestone anniversary. games™ visited the legendary British outfit to discuss the past and get a sense of what the future might hold



WE ARE STANDING IN JASON KINGSLEY'S OFFICE, SURROUNDED BY THE MESS OF SUCCESS. In our left hand, a decommissioned STEN Mk. II, our right a Welrod pistol – a rare relic of the Second World War that the jubilant co-founder of Rebellion Developments remarks is "so quiet you wouldn't even realise that you were dead" – both of which were first used for photogrammetry reference in *Sniper Elite 4*, and now for playtime for impressionable game journalists. A suit of jousting armour stands proudly in the corner of the room, surveying stacks of memorabilia and graphic novels overflowing from bookcases with buckling shelves; framed magazine covers and scuffed game boxes sit in unorganised stacks across the floor; if anything, it's a reflection of how divided Kingsley's attention has become over the years.

Turning we see him smiling, planning an afternoon of milestone tests and meetings with executives; behind him some two hundred employees have their heads down on a number of projects – some known, and many un – all the while the editors and artists of *2000AD* sit far from the chaos of game creation, management and marketing that occurs within these walls, diligently plugging away at the next edition of the iconic weekly prog. This is the office of Rebellion Developments, hidden away in the backstreets of Oxford as it has been for so many years. 25 years, to be exact; 25 years on from its inception and it is still business as usual here, the studio and its personnel too busy to take a second for reflection. Thankfully, **games™** is on the scene to force the issue.

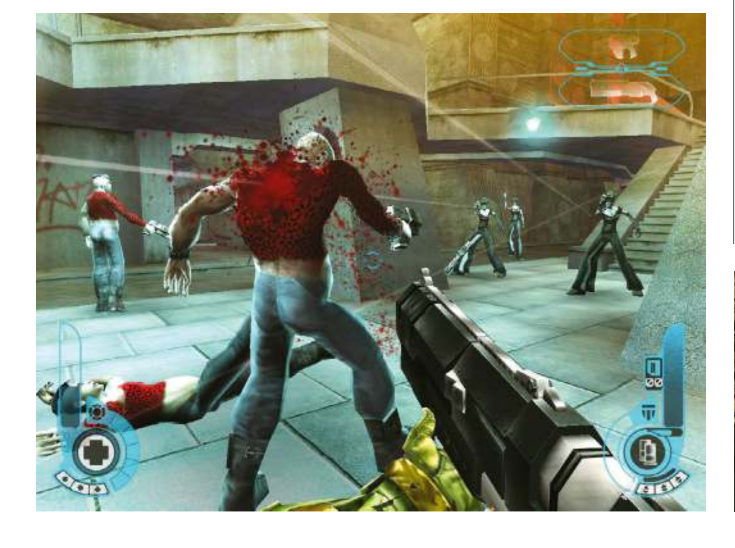
"If I could abstract myself from myself I'm sure I would see it as something that's really impressive," laughs Jason Kingsley, co-founder of Rebellion alongside his brother, Chris. "The trouble is, when you're actually doing it, you are treating each day and each opportunity as they come along. It's only when you look over your shoulder – which quite often you don't do, not when you're making computer games or running a business – that you realise how far you've come."

Kingsley likens this entire experience to meticulously planning and embarking on a long journey. That were you to mark the starting point of this story on a map and chart it to where Rebellion is today, the journey itself may indeed look so impossible, so incomprehensible to achieve that you probably wouldn't start down the path to begin with. But Kingsley knows better than most that an endeavour such as this is taken one step at a time, the road paved with one release after the other. "It doesn't feel like it has been 25 years, but then sometimes it feels like a lifetime. It's weird… there

I WAS ALWAYS VERY INTERESTED IN BUILDING THE LANDSCAPES FOR PEOPLE TO ADVENTURE IN

■ Rebellion is an oddity in the industry as it also has interests outside of game making. It has owned *2000AD* since the year 2000 and also has its hands in TV and movie production, comic book archiving and book publishing.

■ Jason Kingsley assures us that more *2000AD* games are coming, with third-party developers pitching the company to use the licenses. Expect to see these announced shortly.







have been various milestones along the way, ups and downs, and it's amazing how much you forget about or just don't think about when you're immediately doing it."

"You know, there is good busy and there is bad busy. And at the moment we are in good busy mode," he considers, briefly settling on the memory of a successful 12 months thanks to the launch of *Battlezone* and *Sniper Elite 4*; the promise of 2018 burning brightly with the impending release of *Strange Brigade*. "Sometimes I'd like a bit more time to reflect, but that's not to be. There is a quote in *Conan The Barbarian*, where somebody remarks that Conan should rest and it's said that 'there is time enough for the Earth in the grave'. I take inspiration from that."

If Kingsley is looking to 35-year-old Akiro the Wizard banter to help survive his day to day, you might be wondering how Rebellion got to where it is today without collapsing in on itself – such is the scope and scale of its activities across so many different proficiencies. But, in spite of the challenges it has faced, it is now the largest independent videogame studio in Europe, a publisher of books and comics, and a production company for both television and film projects. Both of the founding brothers are as involved today in the day-to-day as they were back in 1992 but it was, of course, a different world then – the nature of that involvement has shifted somewhat with time.

The Kingsley brothers had never intended to start a company of their own, it just sort of *happened*. Flash back to 1992 and the duo were finishing up their respective academic degrees at Oxford University – Jason a student of Zoology, Chris of Chemistry – looking towards starting doctorates and freelancing in the games industry in their spare time. In the end that freelance work would balloon, the doctorates would fall to the wayside, and larger ambitions would begin to take form.

"My brother and I started to do various freelance work for various people and various projects, but it became increasingly obvious that we were being leant on to do a lot of the management as well – a lot of wrangling of teams and communication. I was often being paid as the freelance artist, but because of my personality and because of the way I was, I was getting asked to do management and organising around teams of three or four people," says Jason, explaining that it was this unintended expansion of job roles that eventually inspired the creation of Rebellion. "I thought that this was a bit wrong; I'm being asked to do these things but I actually have no power," he says, with a shrug and a smile. "I wasn't in a position to do anything about it and, you know, I wasn't being paid to do it either.

"I remember once that somebody got into trouble. The publisher at the time phoned me and shouted at me down the line, questioning why my team hadn't done this, this and this. 'I'm just a freelance artist! Why are you shouting at me? I don't run their schedule… if you have issues they are contracted to you, you deal with them. I'm just delivering my artwork – which is on time by the way and you haven't paid me my last milestone,'" he says, laughing. "And I realised that I was reasonably competent – or, at least, less incompetent than the others on my team at managing time. So it made sense to then go and start my own company."

ATARI HAD THE LICENCE TO DO AVP, BUT THEY WANTED TO DO A SIDE-SCROLLING BEAT-'EM UP – WE SAID NO

Rebellion hit it big, and it hit it big early. It's the sort of opportunity that is reflective of how open and reactive the industry was back in early the nineties. While publishers were ultimately considered to be the gatekeepers, there were opportunities for upstarts with initiative that don't perhaps exist today, at least not in the same way. For Rebellion, Jason and Chris, it would be a chance meeting with Atari in 1992 that would lay the foundation that the rest of the studio could be established around. Listening to Jason retell the story, the chaos of it all – of Atari struggling to keep a hold of its slipping market presence – is immediately apparent. Truth be told, it's amazing that anything got done to begin with

"We put a demo together and went in to see Atari," Kingsley continues, still beaming with pride over the creation of a rudimentary 3D dragon flight game ahead of the pitch meeting. "This was an Atari that had fallen on hard times; this was in Slough and they were in this enormous building that was pretty much empty… but it *was* a fantastic snapshot of early seventies decor. It was brown hessian wallpapered, and you know how the hessian wallpaper when it comes around walls frays because people have been rubbing against it, so there are just bits of it all over the place coming off… it was like some seventies post-apocalyptic office, it was fantastic.

"We went through a chamber, up some stairs, through another room, through a series of hallways and, eventually, we finally pitched our idea. We pitched it to Atari UK's Alastair Boden first; he loved our demo and took it to managing director, Bob Gleadow," he says, laughing at the ridiculousness of it all. "Bob said 'that's brilliant, it'll work really well for the new Atari Jaguar,'" but, as Kingsley tells it, this was the first anybody in Atari's UK team has heard of the ill-fated system.

"So, basically, his announcement to his team that there was to be a new console involved two young up-starts, a demo and him telling his senior members of staff that there was to be a new computer console. It was one of those slightly embarrassing moments where Chris and I were sitting there going 'we actually shouldn't really be in this meeting, should we… oh shit, what do we do?'," he says laughing once again. It may be fun to look back on today, but back then it would be the catalyst that started this entire adventure for the Kingsley brothers. "We got commissioned to do two games: *Checkered Flag* and, of course, *Aliens Vs. Predator*."

The titles released in 1994 for the Atari Jaguar and would prove to be Rebellion's big break. "We set up the company, got an office and hired our first staff, and chugged along from there," says Kingsley, but even he knows that it could have gone differently had Atari had its way. "Atari had the licence to do *Aliens Vs. Predator*, but they wanted to do a side-scrolling beat-'em up – we said no. We [thought] we should be doing a 2.5D, into-the-screen kind of 3D thing," says Kingsley, noting that the young team's rebellion didn't end there. "Oh and, by the way, we want players to be able to play as the Colonial Marine, the Alien and the Predator – it was the first time anybody had really suggested playing the bad guys. Of course these days it isn't that uncommon, where you play all three sides, but back then it was kind of unusual – I don't think anybody else had done it. And the rest of course, is history."

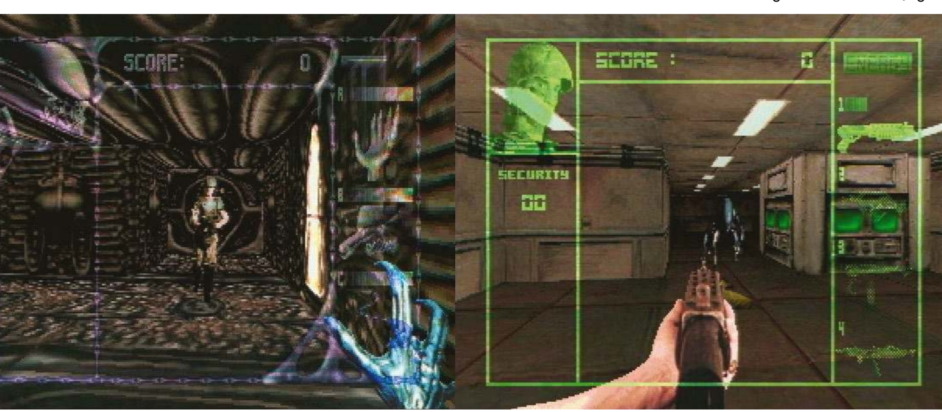
It *is* history, but it isn't the full story. Given their backgrounds, hearing this isolated tale, it might seem as if the brothers stumbled onto a piece of good fortune. But, dig a little deeper and you'll find that a desire to get into videogames stemmed from a lifelong obsession with storytelling – with driving player engagement and sharing in interactive narrative forms, before that was really a thing in the virtual world.

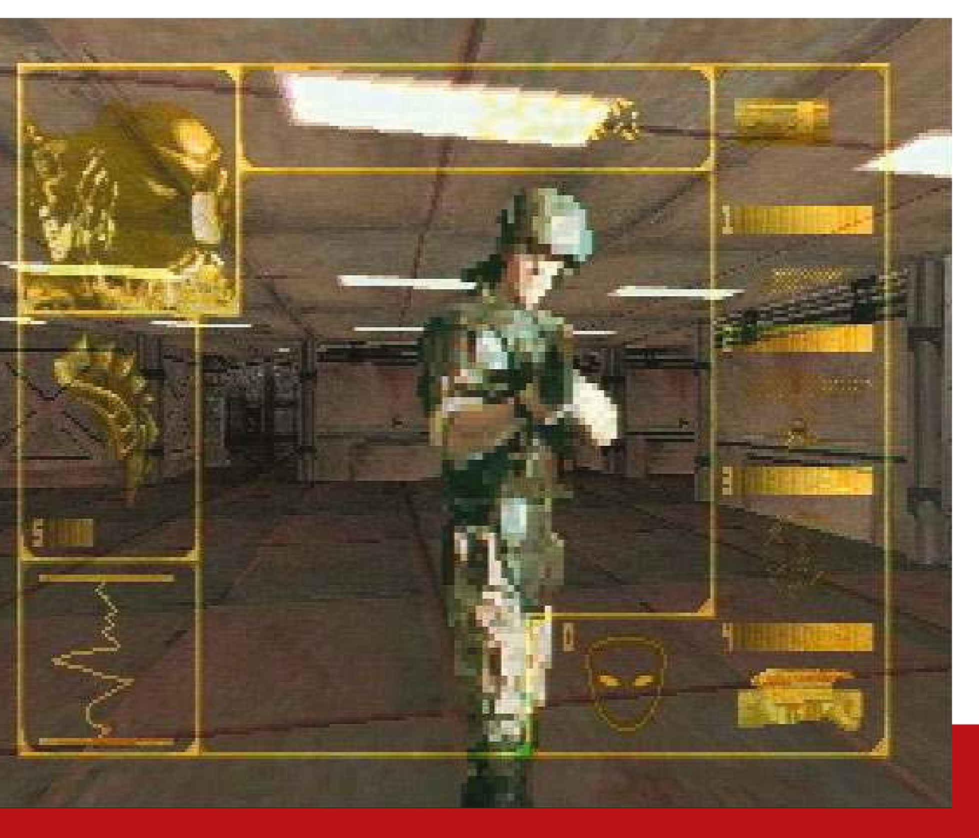
"We were always hobbyists. I played quite a lot of role-playing games – Dungeons & Dragons, Tunnels & Trolls, Rune Quest, Traveller – that was my lunchtimes in school," Kingsley recalls, remembering an old store room the school would clear out in the winter so he and his friends could continue their adventures into the unknown without succumbing the cold of the outside world. "I was always very interested in building the landscapes for people to adventure in. I always played the dungeon master; it sort of grew from there. Chris was always very technical, he built his first computer from a kit (called an EduKit), and we were lucky enough to get the Commodore PET between us when we were quite young – I think our parents saw the value in getting us both computer literate."

Perhaps this is why the brothers have found such success. While both are creative, they are artistically capable in quite different, quite complementary, ways. For Jason it would be in art and writing, a proficiency that saw the



■ *Alien Vs. Predator* was the first true success for Rebellion. It became one of the best-selling games on the Atari Jaguar.







WHAT ABOUT 2000AD?

WHY HAS REBELLION NOT TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE LICENCES IT HAS OWNERSHIP OVER?

ONE OF THE BIGGEST surprises in the Rebellion story is that of *2000AD*. The purchase of the legendary British comic book company in 2000 was a bold move, though the game maker has yet to take (in the eyes of many) full advantage of the licences. So, what's the deal?

"The real reason we haven't made very many *2000AD* games is just because we are so busy, with our existing franchises that are successful. We are an independent studio that owns *2000AD*, we don't want to just be *those guys* making *2000AD* games.

"The idea was that *2000AD* had to stand on its own two feet. It's its own business, and it has its own management and its editorial oversight; it has to make money as a standalone part of the business. If there is a crossover, brilliant; but if there isn't, it doesn't matter. It's a constant source of confusion as to why we haven't done a dozen Judge Dredd games and the answer is because we haven't had the time, the space, or the resources," says Jason Kingsley, who has proven time and time again that the studio would rather the licences stay on ice if they aren't going to be used properly.

In a sense though, it's funny. The reason Rebellion even showed any interest in *2000AD* came about by complete accident. The company wasn't looking to be sold, and Rebellion wasn't looking to buy it – Kingsley, initially, just wanted to license a character. "The whole thing was madness and hubris," he laughs, sticking by the outlandish business decision. "It started out with me wanting to license a character, Strontium Dog, and I was rejected… I just thought that was really weird and started looking into why."

That game never materialised. But that isn't to say it never will, and that goes for all of the characters and worlds *2000AD* holds – there are going to be games coming in the near future, they just won't necessarily be developed by Rebellion directly. "We are doing some work with third parties on *2000AD*, which is very exciting. We've opened up the library to third parties to pitch to us and there are more than a handful of those actually happening now – though they haven't been announced. It'll be exciting to see what they are all able to do though!"

■ Rebellion uses its own proprietary game engine. Designed to be highly scalable, it means the team is able to quickly and efficiently work across various hardware and adjust to different specifications quickly and simply.



NOTABLE RELEASES

THE RELEASES THAT HAVE HELPED ESTABLISH REBELLION



ALIEN VS. PREDATOR

Released for the Atari Jaguar in 1994, *Alien Vs. Predator* is widely considered to be one of the best-selling games for the system, putting Rebellion on the map. Much of the company's success can be tracked back to this innovative and ambitious game.



CHECKERED FLAG

Released in 1991 for the Atari Lynx, Rebellion was hired in 1994 to develop an enhanced version of the game for the Jaguar. Featuring polygonal graphics, as well as the option to change weather conditions, it put the studio on the map as a work-for-hire outfit.



JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS. DEATH

Following the acquisition of *2000AD* in 2000, Rebellion developed its first game based on the licences it now held. *Dredd vs. Death* proved to be polarising, though was ultimately praised for its dedication to the source material, arcade and multiplayer modes.



ROGUE TROOPER

Released in 2006, *Rogue Trooper* received BAFTA nominations for its screenplay and characterisation of Rogue, with positive critical acclaim following close behind. *Rogue Trooper* became something of a cult hit, mustering a full remaster late in 2017.



SNIPER ELITE

Without question Rebellion's most popular and enduring series, *Sniper Elite* put players into the position of a lone sniper and has now gone on to inspire multiple sequels, a spin-off series and over 10 million sales for the game series.



ZOMBIE ARMY TRILOGY

A tactical third-person shooter spin-off of the Sniper Elite series, *Zombie Army Trilogy* is an alternate history romp that delivered throwaway fun for any players that were looking for a little more mileage from Sniper's fun core systems.



BATTLEZONE

Rebellion's first foray into virtual reality, *Battlezone* proved to be one of the launch title hits for Sony's PSVR. The studio purchased the rights through Atari's bankruptcy proceedings in 2013; yet another shrewd purchase on the part of the Kingsley brothers.

young Kingsley brother succeed before Rebellion made a mark on the industry. "I tried programming… but my skill was not in doing it; Chris' was, he was much, much better at me doing that than I ever was."

"I did however write some adventure game books for Ladybird though, and they were very successful. One was an original that was *Steeleye And The Lost Magic*, which made me an international best seller at the age of 18 – that was rather nice," he recalls, although we shouldn't ever expect to see a Rebellion adaptation of his earliest creation in the near future: "I got £800 for it, it was a full buyout."

It was, ultimately, these adventures – the craft and the play of them – that would inspire the brothers. As Jason tells it, it was through recognising the fundamental flaws in their design that he became inspired to get into gaming. "One of the problems with game books is that it says 'Turn to Page 42' and so you can turn to Page 42 but if you don't like the outcome you can turn back. And I thought, well, if I can computerise it so that you couldn't just turn back then there would be no temptation to cheat – because you couldn't. That was part of the inspiration to work in computer games, because the computer could do the dungeon mastering for you. A very primitive and very unsophisticated level compared to today's games, but it was very much the driving force."

That driving force has led Rebellion to where it is today, a studio that has emerged from the mire of work for hire and established itself as a force in the market. We quickly got the sense that it was these days – where the studio's fate was at the beck and call of the decisions made by other developers – that were the most testing for Rebellion, as a company built and staffed by creatives. As Kingsley will put it contemplatively: "When you work for hire, whoever is paying the piper calls the tune."

He speaks obscurely about clashes with publishers over game content, artistic decisions and direction details that were ultimately forced from their hands if they wanted to keep the lights on and, more importantly, pay the wages of its staff on time – of the crippling effect this could have on morale. Given the history of Rebellion, one of rebellion itself, work for hire never seemed like the right fit. And so, just as the Kingsley brothers did back in 1992, it forged its own path. That's a decision the pair has never backed away from, even if it does come with significant personal risk.

"We made a transition recently – in the last five years – from work to hire to self-funding and self-publishing our own titles, and that's been a sea change for us. With work for hire, your cash flow is underpinned by somebody else's," says Kingsley, giving us quite the insight into the pressure of modern game development. "They pay you on a monthly basis and you deliver a game to the requirements of the other people – and you take that warts and all."

"You can push back if you think a game idea sounds rubbish, but they can turn around, and historically have done, saying 'we are paying the cheque, either do it our way or stop working on the project. So you shrug your shoulders and get on with it; then the game comes out and everybody hates it because of the thing you said. You are left defending a series of choices – or in some cases, not even because you're not allowed to say anything – but you're left in a situation thinking 'yeah, we know, we told them that, but there was F-all we could do about it' and it's because they were writing the cheque. So you kind of get poison chalices when you work for hire."



Rebellion is planning to expand in 2018, with a huge archive vault in the back of the office being cleared out for more space to sit bodies. It'll be a shame to see it go though, it's mighty impressive.

THE MONEY THAT WE PUT INTO SNIPER ELITE GAMES IS ENTIRELY ME AND MY BROTHER'S MONEY – AND IT ISN'T POCKET MONEY EITHER

Rebellion's future is in the development, marketing and publishing of its own titles in-house. It's a risk, Kingsley tells us, but one worth taking. Not only is the company's future back in the hands of its founders, but it means Rebellion is free to pursue its own interests and own the results. "This has meant that the risk profile is different. We are risking our own money. The money that we put into Sniper Elite games is entirely me and my brother's money – and it isn't pocket money either," he says, laughing once more. "But it's entirely our risk. It also means that we haven't got anybody else to blame; if we make bad choices it's on us, but if we make good choices we can claim the credit. So, a lot of people are very happy in work for hire – and we were as well for a time – but we are even happier doing our own thing.

"We've had some highs and a few lows, but we've had more highs. Every one of our games has made a profit," Kingsley reveals. "I think there are companies out there today who have one massive profit, one massive game, and have completely failed to reproduce it again. We, on the other hand, have ground out medium-level successes to high-level successes… what I care about is the return of investment for my company. Can I sell enough copies of my games to put the money back in; to pay everybody's salaries and then make another game? If I'm being honest, that's really all I care about."

So, what's next? For Rebellion it could quite literally be anything. The company is deep into production of the *Judge Dredd: Mega-City One* TV series (and yes, Kingsley has opened lines of communication with Karl Urban and Olivia Thirlby, whom he knows from his role as producer on 2012's *Dredd*); *2000AD*, Abaddon Books, and the Treasury of British Comics is preparing for a huge year ahead; the studio itself is expanding its floor space to be able to seat another hundred or so employees, a ramp up in production for whatever projects will follow the release of *Strange Brigade* in early 2018. Basically, what we're trying to say, is that 25 years in and Rebellion Developments has never been busier.

"It's not like Chris and I have retired, we are still in the depths of making computer games, and publishing comics and books; now we have TV, we've got documentaries going on, dramas, all kinds of stuff," says Kingsley, more excited by what tomorrow might bring than reflecting on the past. "There is more than ever happening and, in some ways, I'm just constantly distracted by exciting things to do in the future. It's a great place to be."

Stephen Fry made his videogame debut in LittleBigPlanet, starring as The Narrator. It was his presence that ensured the game felt decidedly British.

GAME CHANGERS

LITTLEBIGPLANET

Developer: Ubisoft Montreal **Publisher:** Sony Interactive Entertainment **Released:** 27 October 2008 **System:** PS3

Media Molecule put the creativity of the community in control and came out all the better because of it. Here **games™** remembers one of the PlayStation 3's best ever exclusives

OFTEN, THE SUCCESS or failure of a complex concept lives and dies in the pitch. *LittleBigPlanet* may have released exclusively for PlayStation 3 in 2008, but for developer Media Molecule the journey began back in 2005. It envisioned a physics-based, 2D side-scrolling game that would serve as a canvas for the community's creativity – existing under the prototypal name *Craftworld*. Console gamers weren't yet au fait with the joy to be found in user-generated content, only just beginning to flirt with online-connectivity. It was a risk, but it was one that piqued the interest of Sony all the same. Fast forward to 2008 and Media Molecule had captured the attention of the entire industry; a stunning GDC demonstration the year prior was a statement of intent, but ultimately the success of *LittleBigPlanet* falls on how much its core message, its pitch, resonated with the masses: "Play, Create, Share."

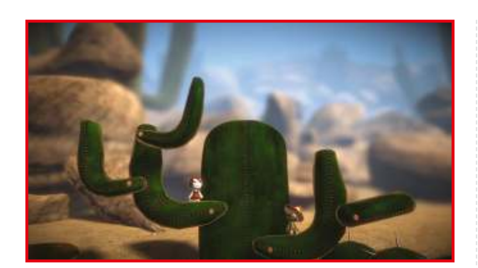
THE CONCEPT OF PLAY, CREATE, SHARE WAS A HUGE SUCCESS FOR BOTH MEDIA MOLECULE AND SONY, STARTING HERE WITH LITTLEBIGPLANET

Those three words became an expression of intent for Sony in the earliest days of the PS3. *LittleBigPlanet* was the largest proponent of the concept, delivering a title that put a huge emphasis on three core elements: playing alone or with others either online or on the same console, creating new content with easy to understand in-game creation tools, and sharing those creations with millions of other players across the world.

It's easy to forget that Media Molecule delivered one of the most entertaining platformers of the generation in *LittleBigPlanet*. So much attention has been cast on the Create and Share aspects that its Play

THINKING BIG

HOW THE CORE MESSAGE OF THE GAME IS PUT ACROSS ON SCREEN



PLAY

★ Designed as a physics-based 2.5D platformer, *LittleBigPlanet* came equipped with high quality, pre-built levels that ensured everybody could enjoy the play regardless of whether they wanted to inject a little of their own creativity into the world.



CREATE

★ *LittleBigPlanet's* creative tools were a success because the basics were so solid. It was easy for anybody to build basic and fun levels, although Media Molecule engineered a surprising amount of depth into the systems. Players that wanted to break genre had all the freedom in the world.



SHARE

★ None of this would have worked had the Share component of this functioned inadequately. Thankfully, the PlayStation Network proved up to the task, giving players an easy to navigate (and moderate) space that allowed good ideas and wild creativity to truly thrive.

is often overlooked. But a community of players quickly formed around *LittleBigPlanet*, eager to dig into a main story comprised of 50 pre-built levels, each of which drew inspiration from a variety of real-world locales in a fantastical fashion. These levels established a solid level of quality across the breadth of the experience, representing the base-line that would-be creatives could draw from as they looked to visualise their imaginations and form their own design expertise.

Impressively, these levels weren't flat 2D affairs either; Sackboy could manoeuvre between three planes of depth, ducking between the foreground, middle-ground and background to further explore the delightful patchwork constructions. It was starkly imaginative; the story mode, while short, was outstanding in its professionalism and creativity. Better still, the studio handed the community the tools to recreate the whole thing over; the environments, the objects that filled them, the physics system, everything. What followed was a genuine revolution in the gaming space, ushering in a period in which players were not merely consumers but directly involved in shaping the experience itself.

What's more impressive still is how intrinsically linked each of the three pillars were to the experience, even at launch. Media Molecule put a major emphasis on Create. Players were encouraged to create their own adventures with the intuitive built-in level creator and to utilise the variety of objects they had made throughout the campaign to begin bringing them to life. The creation tools were comprehensive; AI routines could be established, the physics system could be used to create moving objects, motorised structures, and a variety of intuitive, ingenious creations. Premade level and object templates were included to give players a good place to start, but it's what came in the months following release that really captured the attention.

As players began to learn the complexities of the tools they had been handed, the templates started to fall away. *LittleBigPlanet* may have been designed as a platformer, but it wasn't long before it was home to a variety of genres – including racing, fighting, shooting and sports games. The ingenuity of the community seemed to know no bounds, and that's a testament to how fantastic Media Molecule's implementation of its creation and testing systems were. Back in 2008, few truly believed that this would or could even work; by 2009, as online co-op creation sessions were introduced to play via a software patch, the industry was fully behind Media Molecule's dream debut.

The biggest problem with games that build their identity around community creations are the questions of quality and that of sustainability. Look back to the reviews of *LittleBigPlanet*, and you can see echoes of these concerns; whether anybody would ever create anything that other people would actually want to play, and of how easy it would be to actually find the good amongst the bad. Teething issues regarding server stability and moderation aside, the global community features introduced by Media Molecule were a huge success. With over two million levels created and uploaded to LittleBigWorkshop by 2010, *LittleBigPlanet's* community would only grow in size over the years.

Requiring creators to play through their level to the end before it could be shared ensured that most were at least functional, while an in-game system of rating and reviewing would prove to be enough to push the best into contact with a public eager to digest the creations of their fellow gamers.

The concept of Play, Create, Share was a huge success for both Media Molecule and Sony, starting here with *LittleBigPlanet* – a game that found huge success and brought so much to an industry that was looking to connect with players in a new age of global experiences. *LittleBigPlanet* was a landmark release, proving that even the most contentious concepts can become a reality when the approach is forthright and genuine. It inspired a decade of construction, imagination and exploration, and its influence will forever be felt in the design and execution of releases that seek to put the community in the spotlight.

KEY FACTS

- Following the strength of its early demos, Media Molecule became a first-party Sony developer in 2006. Sony funded the project, gaining ownership over the IP in the process. As Media Molecule moved on from LittleBigPlanet, Sumo Digital would later take on lead development duties of *LBP3* in 2014.

- With three games on the market, LittleBigPlanet's community has certainly been active over the decade. There are over ten million user-created levels available on the PlayStation Network, with more to be found on the handheld titles.

GAME CHANGERS

8 GAMES THAT THRIVED BECAUSE OF USER-GENERATED CONTENT

LITTLEBIGPLANET MAY HAVE FOUND SUCCESS BY BUILDING OFF OF THE PLAY, SHARE, CREATE MANTRA, BUT IT WASN'T THE ONLY ONE TO PUT PLAYERS' CREATIVITY AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE EXPERIENCE



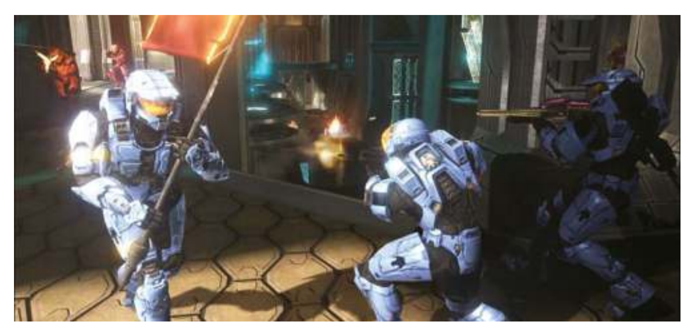
LITTLEBIGPLANET 2

LittleBigPlanet 2 saw Media Molecule massively shift the direction of the series from the platforming genre in an attempt to establish it as a platform for games. Leaning heavily into the Play, Create, Share mantra, the company expanded the variety of options when it came to level and object design, to give players a larger space to be creative. The ultimate game for sharing imaginative designs with the world, *LittleBigPlanet 2* is a masterful videogame – it even earned itself a 10/10 from **games™**.



SUPER MARIO MAKER

Nintendo has always had a habit of demonstrating its brilliance through the 2D Mario games; they showcase a true mastery over level design. In 2015, Nintendo handed the keys to the (Mushroom) kingdom to the players, letting them create their own levels and experiences from the Super Mario series. These could be shared out to the world, so long as the designer could first complete their creation, ensuring some truly brilliant, and challenging, gauntlets found their way out into the hands of players.



HALO 3

While many games in the Halo franchise have expanded upon the basics of Forge over the years, there's still something special about the version included with *Halo 3*. Releasing before *LittleBigPlanet*, it demonstrated that there was a hunger out there from the community for generating content. Forge enabled players to insert and remove game objects within the framework of existing multiplayer maps. Halo players would go on to create some exceptional maps and unique gameplay modes within Forge.



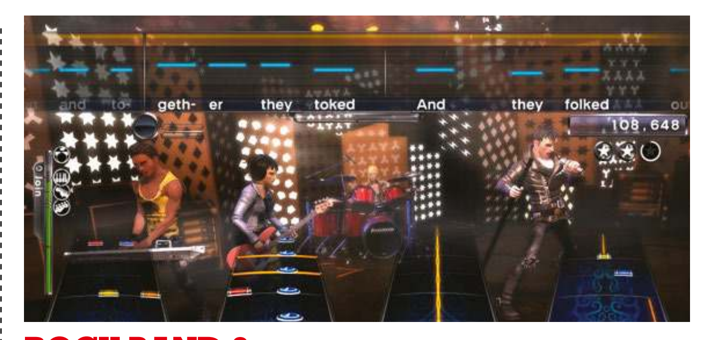
MINECRAFT

It may have had humble beginnings, but *Minecraft* has since evolved into one of the biggest games in the world. It found a lot of success as players began hooking up on forums and on video platforms such as YouTube and Twitch, letting a community come together to excavate huge worlds and construct some truly incredible structures, objects and environments. *Minecraft* is perhaps the biggest and most active proponent of the Play, Create, Share mantra.



MODNATION RACERS

This go-kart racing game released in 2010 was Sony's attempt to take Play, Create, Share out of *LittleBigPlanet* and into other exclusive experiences. User-generated content was at the heart of it, with developer United Front Games eager to ensure that, should you dream of it, you'd be able to create it within the intuitive frameworks established around the circuit builder. Expansive multiplayer options and expressive creation mechanics made this one of the PS3's most beloved racing titles.



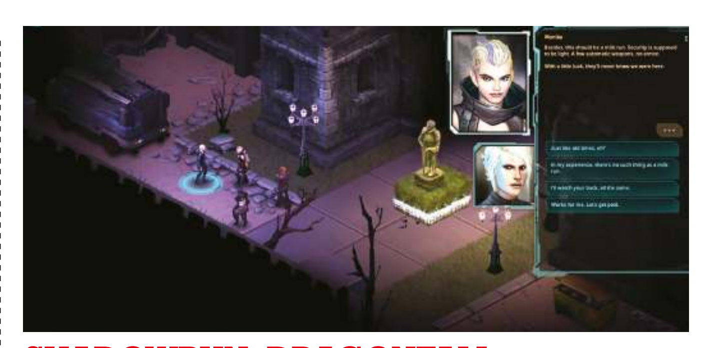
ROCK BAND 3

There was a time where Rock Band and Guitar Hero practically ruled gaming – and had a huge impact on the music industry too, with some bands even finding global successes through the inclusion of their music. Harmonix expanded this substantially for *Rock Band 3*, letting players plot out their own tracks and have them included in the Rock Band Network – and even earn a profit from any sales. It's an often overlooked, but pretty awesome, example of Play, Create, Share spreading across the industry.



PROJECT SPARK

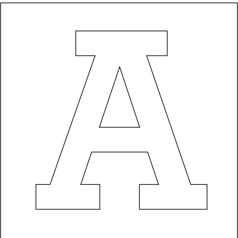
Microsoft once tried to emulate the success of *LittleBigPlanet* and it did not go well. The base experience was actually pretty wonderful, with the company delivering a platform in which Xbox One owners could create and share some truly incredible worlds and (in some cases) full game experiences. While the tools were all there, *Project Spark* was intrinsically linked with Kinect, which meant it really failed to grab the attention of the public despite some pretty intuitive UGC support.

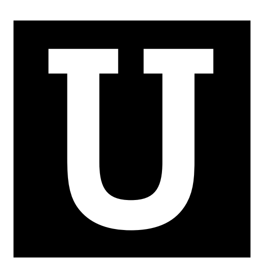


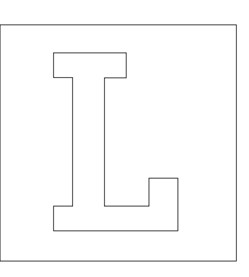
SHADOWRUN: DRAGONFALL

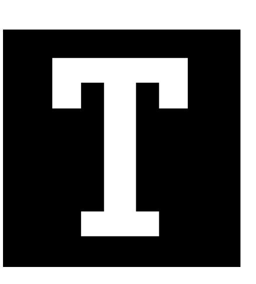
Sometimes, some of the best instances of user-generated content comes from the unlikeliest of places. Much like StarCraft and Sid Meier's Civilization before it, Shadowrun has a truly vibrant community around it, totally changing the scope of the original release. From gameplay enhancements, to character creation tools, to huge content add-ons and missions, developer Harebrained Schemes has a vibrant community of players around its titles that love to create and share.











- The Arctis 3 is designed for wired gaming, but it also includes Bluetooth support should you want to take them out into the world and listen to music on the go.
- Cross-compatibility is important, and that's why SteelSeries has designed the Arctis for use with Xbox One, PC, PS4 and the Nintendo Switch – not to mention any Bluetooth compatible devices.
- A clearcast microphone offers fantastic clarity for all of our multiplayer gaming needs. It's also retractable meaning you can hide it away for when you hit the streets with these headphones.
- Surprisingly comfortable, the Arctis 3 is great for lengthy usage thanks to the thick ear cushions and a (fully adjustable and removable) ski goggle suspension band.

STEELSERIES ARCTIS 3 BLUETOOTH

MANUFACTURER: **STEELSERIES** PRICE: **£134.99**



There's a problem with gaming peripherals. While headphone manufacturers such as SteelSeries and Turtle Beach often keep the quality benchmark high it often comes with a significant trade off, that of style. For the kind of money you're paying for a set of these headphones, versatility is key; being able to transition between playing games in virtual 7.1 surround sound, to watching film and listening to music without losing any of the depth or dynamism in sound should be imperative. The problem is, so many of these sets look like unused props from 1995's Hackers – we wouldn't be caught dead wearing a headset in public with flashing LED lights and outrageously bulky headband designs that so often come as standard.

Thankfully, the Arctis 3 Bluetooth comes equipped with a respectful and all-purpose design. Essentially identical to the standard (and £50 cheaper) wired Arctis 3 model that released in mid-2017, this Bluetooth version is all about the versatility; "Wired for gaming, Bluetooth for life," as the marketing tag would have you believe. And, truth be told, it isn't far off. The addition of Bluetooth – with a battery life rated for 28 hours of 'active listening time' – is fantastic, turning the Arctis 3 into a reliable headset that's got your back no matter the activity.

Still, that all said, the headphones still perform better for gaming than they do for music or podcast consumption. The dynamic range is clear and concise, ensuring you're able to pick out some of the miniature in well recorded and produced records, although audio heads will no doubt take umbrage with the somewhat warm sound that can put a dampener on heavy, bass and drum-driven music – rock and hip hop fans, prepare for some cans that will get the job done, but not necessarily bring the best out of your favourite tunes. But for the money you'll be hard pressed to find a headset that covers so many of the bases so excellently; perfect for multiplayer gaming (although you are stuck with the wired configuration for such an activity) and decent for music on the move the Arctis 3 Bluetooth is a solid audio solution.

VERDICT 7/10

GAMING CLOTHING



NITW GROUP LEAVES SHIRT

All of the *Night In The Woods* shirts are pretty nice but this might just be our favourite. Celebrate one of 2017's indie hits by wearing it with pride; just don't forget to tell anybody that'll listen to go and play it.
compressmerch.com/collections/



TACOMA T-SHIRT

Show your allegiance to the Lunar Transfer Station Tacoma with this understated tee; it comes in both a light and dark heathered purple variations, but we think both look pretty out of this world.
shop.fullbrig.ht



HADOUKEN ATTACK T-SHIRT

Everybody has that one friend that can't remember how to throw a Hadouken, of all things. So grab them this shirt and give them a fighting chance out in the world.
grindstore.co.uk

TWITCH & YOUTUBE SETUP EQUIPMENT



LOGITECH C922

PRICE: **£84.99**

Logitech delivered such a solid camera in the C922 that it has essentially become the industry standard. Delivering 1080p quality at 30fps or 720 at 60fps, the C922 is a versatile and easy to use streaming device that will cover all of your video recording needs.
LOGITECH.COM

BLUE YETI

PRICE: **£99.99**

Everybody loves the Blue Yeti. Whether you're live streaming, recording voiceovers, or sitting down to issue your hot takes in podcast format, the Blue Yeti will become your new best friend. Easily switchable pre-built settings ensure it's up to any task you throw at it.
BLUEDESIGNS.COM



RAZER SEIREN X

PRICE: **£99.99**

With a small form factor and fantastic design, the Razer Seirēn X is a fantastic alternative to other microphones on the market. It's been optimised for YouTube and Twitch streaming, and is small and light enough that it'll easy slip into your bag – should you have a mobile streaming setup.
RAZERZONE.COM

RAZER KIYO

PRICE: **£99.99**

While Logitech has this market practically cornered, the Razer Kiyo is an interesting alternative. Lighting is so incredibly important when it comes to video and the Kiyo comes with on-board illumination that eliminates harsh shadows. It's a top quality device that we'd highly recommend if you're recording in environments devoid of solid lighting solutions.
RAZERZONE.COM

TURTLE BEACH STREAM MIC

PRICE: **£89.99**

Should you be planning to stream from your Xbox One or PlayStation 4 the other USB microphones listed above aren't going to work. The best alternative is the Streaming Mic from Turtle Beach; easy to set up, decent quality, and small enough to hide from the view of your Kinect or PS Eye camera.
TURTLEBEACH.COM

ELGATO STREAM DECK

PRICE: **£149.99**

Something for the advanced user and those looking to get a little more milage out of their live streams, the Stream Deck from Elgato is a companion accessory that allows you to set up custom commands and macros across 15 LCD buttons to help run and streamline the production of your content.
ELGATO.COM



ELGATO GAME CAPTURE HD60 S

PRICE: **£149.99**

If you're planning on recording any of your gameplay (for YouTube videos) or want a more solid streaming platform then the HD60 S is a must, particularly for console owners. Connecting from your console to your PC, this capture card works over USB and is so incredibly simple to use, letting you record and stream in 1080p/60fps simultaneously.
ELGATO.COM



RAZER RIPSAW

PRICE: **£179.99**

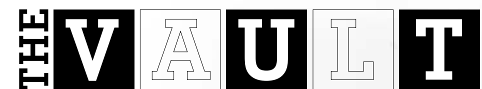
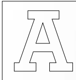
PC owners may want a capture device more versatile and robust than the Elgato offering, and if that's the case it's well worth investing in the Razer Ripsaw. It's a ultra-low latency device that captures in 1080p/60fps, offering professional grade audio mix-in, and is optimised to play nicely with streaming services such as XSplit and OBS.
RAZER.COM

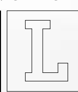
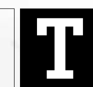
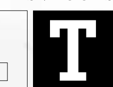


RAZER POP FILTER

PRICE: **£34.99**

This is one of the most important pieces of the puzzle. If you want your audio to sound crisp and clear for the love of god buy a pop shield. Literally any will do, seriously. Position it in front of your microphone and speak through it; it'll cut the harshness back on all your Ps and Qs.
RAZER.COM

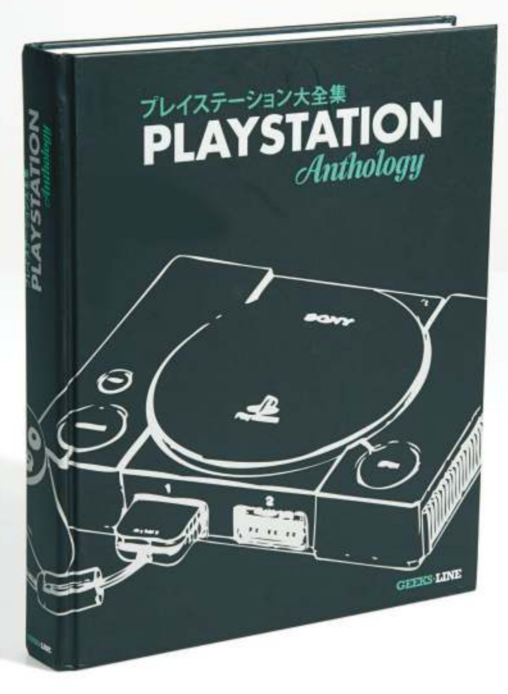





PLAYSTATION ANTHOLOGY – CLASSIC EDITION

PUBLISHER: **GEEKS-LINE**



This is a pure exercise in fan service and nostalgia baiting. Geeks-Line's latest in its popular anthology series is dedicated to the original PlayStation, and it's really something. The oversized hardcover collection is 458 pages of love, dedicated to one of the greatest videogame systems of all time; packed with interviews, history lessons, and information that have been pulled from the vaults.

It's a total celebration of the console, the era, and the visionaries that made it what it is today. 26 interviews with the creative minds behind some of PlayStation's biggest and most important games feature, giving insight into how development teams were grappling with new hardware and new ideas. While the access is indeed fantastic, the best part of the anthology comes in the form of the archive material; photography of all of the weird and wonderful collectibles, special editions and peripherals transforms this book into something of a delightful time machine.

Of course, with over 100 pages dedicated to the history of the console, how it came into being, and the mark it left on the industry, you'll also find plenty to be learned in these glossy pages. Honestly, for the PlayStation fan it doesn't get much better than this. Sure, the design could be a little tighter and perhaps, yes, the typeface is a little large for our liking, but that's nitpicking for the sake of it. The *PlayStation Anthology* is a compact and detailed history lesson of an important console and an important time for the industry.

geeksline-publishing.com





HEARTHSTONE: INNKEEPER'S TAVERN COOKBOOK

Following the success of the *World Of Warcraft: The Official Cookbook* release, Blizzard has now commissioned a follow-up in the form of this wonderful compendium of sweet and savoury recipes, all of them inspired by *Hearthstone: Heroes of Warcraft*. Great design and tasty eats make this a must-own for all WoW fans.

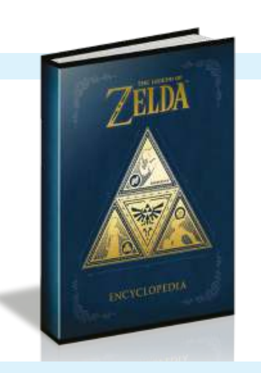
gear.blizzard.com



THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE STRANGE BRIGADE

Rebellion is amping up to the release of *Strange Brigade* with this anthology fiction series. Designed to give players an idea of how chaotic and wondrous the world of *Strange Brigade* is – not to mention an early tease of all of the strange and terrible evils that inhabit it – this is one for those that just can't contain their anticipation.

forbiddenplanet.com



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: ENCYCLOPEDIA

The last hardcover to come in the The Goddess Collection trilogy – which has included *Hyrule Historia* and *Art & Artifacts* – the much-anticipated release of *Encyclopedia* is going to make this the ultimate collection. This is a treasure trove of information about every aspect of the series, a compendium covering 30 years of adventures.

forbiddenplanet.com



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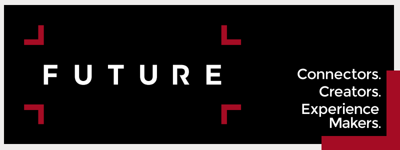
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